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Friday, 19 January 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Abdrakhmanov	(Kazakhstan)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Mituy Edjang
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kuwait	Mr. Al Sabah
	Netherlands	Mr. Haspels
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Czaputowicz
	Russian Federation	Mr. Lavrov
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Field
	United States of America	Mr. Sullivan

Agenda

Maintenance of international peace and security

Building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development

Letter dated 2 January 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2018/7)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Maintenance of international peace and security

Building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development

Letter dated 2 January 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2018/7)

The President: I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, Ministers and other distinguished representatives present in the Security Council Chamber. Their presence underscores the importance of the subject matter we will discuss today.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Belgium, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Her Excellency Ms. Joanne Adamson, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/7, which contains the text of a letter dated 2 January 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting the a concept note on the item under consideration.

The Council has before it the text of a statement by the President on behalf of the Council on the subject of today's meeting. I thank the Council members for their valuable contributions to the statement. In accordance with the understanding reached among the members of the Council, I shall take it that the members of the Security Council agree to the statement, which will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2018/2.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres.

The Secretary-General: I welcome this debate, convened by Kazakhstan, as a sign of enhanced cooperation among Member States in Central Asia and Afghanistan. I also welcome the Security Council's continued support for Afghanistan, as demonstrated by its recent mission to the country. The entire international community has a stake in peace, stability and development in Afghanistan, and the countries of Central Asia have a particularly important role to play.

Sustainable development is a fundamental end in itself, enabling people, communities and societies to flourish and fulfil their potential. But sustainable and inclusive development is also an important factor in preventing and ending conflict and in sustaining peace Only by addressing the root causes of crisis, including inequality, exclusion and discrimination, will we build peaceful societies resilient to terrorism and violent extremism.

The United Nations development system is engaged in supporting Governments throughout the region to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to invest in sustainable economic growth, including greater opportunities for young people, women and girls. Education, vocational training and jobs must be an absolute priority in national and regional development cooperation.

Central Asia has made significant progress on sustainable development in recent decades. In Tajikistan, for example, the poverty rate has been halved, from 81 per cent in 2003 to 31 per cent in 2015. But countries in the region can never achieve their full potential alone. All are landlocked, and many developed over decades as economically interdependent parts of a larger whole. Growth, increased employment opportunities and prosperity depend upon accelerated economic cooperation and integration. The common geography and history of Central Asian countries and Afghanistan and their strong cultural ties create enormous potential for mutually beneficial joint projects, trade and exchange.

Despite the centuries during which the Silk Road was one of the most important trading routes in the world, trade among Central Asian countries has fallen to low levels since they achieved independence nearly 30 years ago. Opportunities for intraregional trade are significant, and even modest improvements can

result in substantial gains for all the people of the region. I am heartened by recent signs of change for the better. During my visit to Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan last June, I was encouraged to see new bilateral and regional connections and better regional dynamics.

First, new efforts are taking place to better manage the water resources that are fundamental to economic development in that region. Those resources are coming under unprecedented strain. As I witnessed during my visit, almost 30 per cent of Tajikistan's spectacular glaciers have melted over the past 10 years alone. The Aral Sea serves as a terrible warning of the consequences of mismanagement. We must use those ecological disasters as examples to spur greater cooperation and action. Central Asian Governments have recently begun to intensify cooperation on water resources through bilateral water commissions and agreements. Those developments hold important lessons for Afghanistan, where water-dependent farming and agriculture make up nearly half the economy. The United Nations is promoting mediation and dialogue through the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia. The Centre is ready to help modernize the regional legal framework on managing transboundary water resources, and is including Afghanistan in its efforts to build capacity in water diplomacy. Finding joint approaches to managing shared water resources, including mechanisms to resolve disputes, builds confidence in bilateral and multilateral relationships. That can lead, in turn, to greater investment and prosperity for the benefit of all.

Secondly, I was encouraged to see positive developments in energy cooperation, which is fundamental to promoting development and security. Several cross-border initiatives are now being planned, or are under way, including the Central Asia-South Asia power project, a natural gas pipeline running from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan and India, and a new power transmission line running from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan. The United Nations family stands ready to support those initiatives and others that can bring greater investment and prosperity to the region.

Thirdly, increased trade is a prerequisite for growth, sustainable development and building resilience to external economic shocks. The personal contacts resulting from trade can also help dismantle informal barriers and increase trust. We should build upon civil society initiatives in that area to bring communities together across borders, including women's groups that mediate local tensions and develop joint infrastructure projects.

In that context, I would like to highlight Kazakhstan's ambitious programme for Afghan students. More than 500 students from Afghanistan graduated from Kazakh universities and technical schools in recent years, and nearly 500 others are in the process of completing their studies. Kazakhstan has committed $50 million to supporting that initiative. Uzbekistan is on the same track. Central Asian countries bordering Afghanistan are now improving cross-border infrastructure, while Uzbekistan launched direct flights between Tashkent and Kabul last year. Several railway and power-line projects are creating physical connections between Afghanistan and its northern neighbours, including the Lapis Lazuli railway, which connects Turkmenistan with Afghanistan. Such projects have enormous potential to spur economic transformation.

Security challenges continue to define much of the discussion surrounding Afghanistan and Central Asia. The Afghan Government's fight against violent extremism, terrorism and transnational organized crime has implications for the entire region and for the world. Responding to such threats cannot be the responsibility of the Afghan Government alone. Effective counter-terrorism depends upon regional and multilateral cooperation based firmly on human rights. The five countries of Central Asia have now completed the second phase of the joint plan of action for implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, adopted in 2011. I was honoured to host the high-level dialogue on the strategy during my visit last June.

The regional plan brings Central Asian countries together to share best practices and lessons learned, thereby reflecting the five countries' joint commitment to addressing and defeating terrorism with the support of the United Nations. Regional cooperation offers opportunities to address common concerns, including countering terrorist financing, improving border security, fostering dialogue with religious institutions and leaders, and countering human trafficking and drug smuggling. The upcoming meeting of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation will be an opportunity for the Afghan Government to set out its vision for a more structured peace and security process coordinated with the wider region, including regional

efforts to fight terrorism and violent extremism. The United Nations stands ready to support those efforts.

With greater regional collaboration and investment, Central Asia and Afghanistan have the potential to become symbols of dialogue, peace and the promotion of contacts among cultures, religions and civilizations. The United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan are cooperating closely and continue to seek out new ways to deepen their support. The entire United Nations family stands ready to assist in promoting greater cooperation and integration among the countries of Central Asia and Afghanistan towards achieving the goals of peace, sustainable development, stability and security.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan.

At the outset, let me express my sincere gratitude to Secretary-General Guterres, all my colleagues from Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and other high-level participants in this extremely important meeting.

Representing Central Asia in the Security Council for the first time in the history of the United Nations, Kazakhstan is honoured to sponsor this debate on building a regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model for linking security and development objectives. That was the vision that His Excellency Mr. Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kazakhstan, proposed in his policy address, which I presented to the Security Council last year (see S/PV.7857): to create a model zone of peace, security and cooperation in Central Asia; to transform the landlocked region into a landlinked one by connecting it to neighbouring regions through trade, transit, transportation and energy exchanges; and to ensure that stability in Afghanistan also contributes to prosperity in the wider region, thereby becoming secure and growing prosperous together. We have a Kazakh proverb that expresses the sentiment succinctly: "The core of happiness is found in unity".

As Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) and the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999) concerning Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities, and, this month, as President of the Security Council, Kazakhstan is keen on underlining the importance of an inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process and reconciliation. Our Permanent Representative, Mr. Kairat Umarov, led a visit by the Security Council this past week to Kabul, during which Council members met with President Ghani and a number of officials. They were updated on plans concerning the peace process and underscored the importance of the holding of credible and inclusive parliamentary elections in 2018 and presidential ones in 2019.

Kazakhstan is also keen on garnering international support for peace and stability in Afghanistan. We recognize ongoing international efforts in that regard, such as the new American strategy for Afghanistan and South Asia, consultations on Afghanistan in the Moscow format and China's Belt and Road Initiative, which will undoubtedly contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the wider region. As a country geographically located in the wider region surrounding Afghanistan, we also have a direct and legitimate interest in solving common threats, addressing challenges and reaping common benefits.

We recognize that stabilization and reconstruction in Afghanistan will also present an opportunity for Central Asian countries to coordinate their efforts and reinvigorate regional cooperation. Kazakhstan, which has always stood behind integration processes in Central Asia, is very much encouraged by increasing efforts fostering mutual understanding and trust in the region. Central Asian Foreign Ministers held a number of five-party meetings in 2016 and 2017 — with the most recent one having taken place last night — which resulted in the adoption of the first-ever joint ministerial statement and joint programme of cooperation for the period from 2018 to 2019 on November 2017 in Samarkand. In the future, we may see Afghanistan join that platform for dialogue.

We hope that increased dialogue and connectivity will help solve common problems and address challenges. One such threat is the intensification of the activities of terrorist groups, particularly the the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (Da'esh) in the northern parts of Afghanistan and the potential return of foreign terrorist fighters to their countries of origin, including Central Asia. We are also concerned about the threat posed by narcotics production in Afghanistan and recognize the importance of close coordination between Afghanistan and Central Asian States in combating the

cultivation, production, trade and trafficking of illicit drugs in Afghanistan. We plan on cooperating more closely with Afghanistan through existing institutions dedicated to that problem, including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre.

But it would be a mistake to consider Afghanistan solely as a source of insecurity and instability. With its immense potential, its favourable geography and considerable human capital, Afghanistan could, and should, also be seen as a strong partner for joint economic projects. We therefore join our Central Asian neighbours in our legitimate interest in intensifying joint efforts in supporting peace, security and development in Afghanistan, while calling on global Powers to contribute to making our region an arena of regional cooperation.

The Council's visit to Afghanistan last week identified a number of security issues and the prospect of finding a possible solution to the situation based on large-scale bilateral and multilateral investments into Afghanistan, with a view not only to support growth and integration into global economic processes, but also as an investment in peace. Additional information about the outcome of the visit was presented two days ago at the special briefing to the Security Council by Kazakhstan's Permanent Representative, who led the trip.

Common geography, economic complementarity and cultural ties between the people of Central Asia and Afghanistan facilitate cooperation. But we also believe that long-term stability and prosperity in the region, as in any other region, should also be guided by the principle of an integrated approach based on the following three pillars.

The first is the recognition and strengthening of the security-development nexus. That means that investment in trade, transit routes, transport and infrastructure development should also be seen as stabilization assets. In that regard, we are confident that the projects pursued by Central Asian countries with Afghanistan — such as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project, the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project and other planned railways and roads — will not support not only connectivity for Central Asian countries but also contribute to stability in Afghanistan, the creation of jobs and to the development of infrastructure the region. Those projects will strengthen links among nations and diffuse potential tensions.

The second pillar is a regional approach. Regional cooperation is imperative given that threats do not recognize borders and are of common and transnational character for our countries, and therefore require a common approach and solution. A good example is our joint efforts on countering terrorism. Central Asia was the first region to develop a joint plan of action to implement the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in 2011. Kazakhstan has now contributed $300,000 to implement the plan. We hope to increase cooperation with Afghanistan through the joint plan of action, including in border security, data sharing, cooperation on fighting against financing of terrorism and so on.

We have also been striving to implement an integrated solution for the management of common water and energy resources in Central Asia. We recognize the need to intensify cooperation on water sharing with Afghanistan in that regard. We call for the streamlining of efforts by the myriad regional organizations operating in Central Asia and Afghanistan and the different regional frameworks, such as the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, the United Nations Special Programme for Economies of Central Asia and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Programme, to name a few. Such institutions can help promote the Sustainable Development Goals at the regional level. We also commend the role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia in collaborating closely to facilitate the bilateral and multilateral engagement of Central Asian States with Afghanistan.

The third pillar of a successful strategy is a coordinated transparent approach led by the United Nations agencies. Streamlined operations under the One United Nations approach are vital in the light of rapidly diminishing development aid. We reiterate the importance of maximizing the efficiency and efficacy of the work of the United Nations in Afghanistan and Central Asia, including through enhanced coordination across the United Nations system.

We also call on the donor community to increase its contribution to peace and development in and around Afghanistan and to improve the performance

and accountability of official development assistance. Kazakhstan is working to create a United Nations-led regional hub in Almaty designed to help deliver coordinated support for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals to the countries of the region. We believe that the three-pillar approach of economic development, regional cooperation and international coordination could be better used to forge a model of regional peace and development.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our confidence that the Central Asian countries and Afghanistan have the potential to build a stable and prosperous region, while playing an important role in attaining global peace and security.

I wish the Council a very fruitful discussion today.

I now resume my functions as the President of the Council.

I now call on the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait.

Mr. Al Sabah (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov, for convening today's important meeting, which demonstrates the importance of establishing effective regional and subregional partnerships in order to strengthen security and development. It reflects the provisions of Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, which underscores the clear role of regional and subregional organizations in resolving conflicts through peaceful and diplomatic means. I would also like to thank the delegation of Kazakhstan for preparing the concept note (S/2018/7, annex), which demonstrates the importance of effective partnership in restoring development and security in Afghanistan, which only serves to strengthen security in Central Asia and throughout the world. I would also like to take this opportunity to commend the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, for his excellent briefing at the start of the meeting.

The holding of today's meeting, under the presidency of friendly Kazakhstan, demonstrates the importance the countries of Central Asia attach to a return to normalcy in Afghanistan and to the restoration of stability and security. The meeting highlights the efforts made to develop a long-term political and economic plan for Afghanistan that involves the country's neighbours. Given the complex regional environment, we emphasize that close cooperation among neighbouring States is essential for strengthening stability and prosperity and will contribute to ensuring sustainable peace.

My Government appreciates the visit of the Security Council to Afghanistan under Kazakhstan's presidency of the Council, which took place few days before the convening of this meeting. The visit underscores the interest and support of the Security Council for the Government and the people of Afghanistan as part of the efforts of the Government and of the international community to achieve security, stability and reconstruction. It also demonstrates support for democracy and Afghanistan's full return to its normal place in the international community.

Kuwait also notes the important role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We appreciate the vital role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, as well as that of all other United Nations personnel working on the ground in an extremely dangerous setting. In that regard, we note that since September 2010 Kuwait has hosted the UNAMA Support Office. We would like to continue our cooperation with that Office in order to overcome all the difficulties it could encounter. We must ensure that we provide all the assistance necessary to the Office. The State of Kuwait underscores that it is important to strengthen regional partnerships, as well as the role of all United Nations agencies in restoring peace and security in Afghanistan. My country welcomes all international and regional initiatives aimed at supporting such efforts, in accordance with resolution 2344 (2017).

Kuwait would like to express its continued support for the Secretary-General's call for efforts to be made to prevent threats in Afghanistan and Central Asia, and to ensure that conflict prevention and resolution become the main focus of the work of the United Nations in the region, while stressing the importance of preventive diplomacy through, inter-alia, constructive engagement on the part of Member States in order to ensure long-term stability, security and development.

Concerning the importance of preventive diplomacy and regional cooperation, it is important to note the role of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, which is an example of political engagement and preventive efforts on the part

of the United Nations to support its Member States. We encourage Afghanistan to cooperate with the Centre.

Afghanistan has for four decades been experiencing unstable and difficult political and security situations, with negative impacts on the economic and humanitarian situation as well as on regional and international peace and security. It is therefore important to pool the efforts of the international community to tackle these complex challenges. The deterioration of the security situation in the country has slowed economic growth and hampered progress in the political process. We note that the parliamentary elections to be held in July 2018 and the presidential elections in 2019 have been delayed, and that we were looking forward to see them held according to the set timetable.

The deterioration of the security situation has also aggravated the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. The number of civilians requiring urgent humanitarian assistance has reached 3.3 million people. Millions of Afghans have become internally displaced persons or refugees. The worsening of the security situation has also led to an increase in the unemployment rate to 25 per cent, while 40 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line.

We would like to express our concern regarding the continued threats to security and stability in Afghanistan owing to the presence of terrorists and extremist groups such as the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. We note also the presence of other illegal armed and criminal groups, including producers and traffickers of narcotics. We are also worried about the threats that this represents for the region, in particular for Central Asian countries. That is why we call on all States to effectively implement all the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, in particular those pertaining to combating terrorism, and to strengthen international and regional security cooperation so as to promote information exchange and border control, law enforcement and criminal justice, in order to improve the capabilities to address the threats, including that of the return of foreign terrorist fighters.

Kuwait would like to see a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the region. We welcome the contribution made by the States of Central Asia to non-proliferation, including the Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia, and we encourage them to increase their cooperation in preventing illicit trafficking in nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and other radioactive materials.

In conclusion, Afghanistan must not be seen as a threat to regional security but as a key partner. Achieving sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan and in the region requires peaceful and diplomatic solutions. All parties involved must come to the negotiating table and participate effectively and constructively in diplomatic efforts aimed at restoring peace. Military solutions, as history has demonstrated, have never led to lasting solutions for peace. We urge all parties to participate constructively in diplomatic efforts to establish peace, so that Afghanistan and its people can enjoy prosperity and well-being.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland.

Mr. Czaputowicz (Poland): Let me start by congratulating you, Mr. President, and your country, Kazakhstan, on your successful presidency of the Council and commend Astana's initiative to organize this timely debate on building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia. I also highly commend your leadership in convening the recent Security Council visiting mission to Afghanistan, which contributed greatly to this debate.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and his continuous commitment to conflict prevention and sustaining peace.

First, I would like to stress the importance of regional cooperation as an effective means not only of promoting the economic and social development of Afghanistan, but also to promote peace and stability. From my country's perspective, the diversification of economic ties in Central Asian countries serves both their sovereignty and interests well. Central Asia and Afghanistan's location presents a unique opportunity to enhance direct and multinational cooperation aimed at constructing transport and logistics infrastructure that will interconnect Europe and Asia. Those valuable links will facilitate the exchange of not only goods but also ideas and people-to-people contacts as well as mutual understanding.

We are glad to note the recent developments in the region in the field of connectivity. Projects such as the Turkmenistan — Afghanistan — Pakistan — India pipeline, CASA-1000, the railway to Herat and the air-cargo corridor between Afghanistan and India are

excellent examples of the diverse benefits that regional cooperation can bring. We believe that these investments will not only contribute to the region's prosperity, but will also build trust between neighbours.

In this context, we would like to commend the Governments of Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey for having signed the Lapis Lazuli Corridor Agreement. We believe that this vital document will facilitate one of the most effective ways of linking Afghanistan to European markets as well as help diminish its dependence on neighbouring countries in terms of transit and transportation.

We must remember that even the most ambitious agenda with regard to regional economic connectivity may fail owing to an unstable security situation, as a secure, stable and prosperous Afghanistan is a prerequisite for peace and stability in the region as a whole. We are alarmed by the continuing high level of violence in numerous Afghan cities and the resulting number of civilian casualties.

Regarding the improvement in security, we welcome the Afghan Government's four-year security-sector reform plan, in the hope that it will strengthen the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. However, military success is only a means to an end, which is to achieve peace.

We are deeply convinced that an inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process is the only viable long-term solution to ending the conflict. We hope that the Kabul Process brings much-needed progress, but we would like to underline the importance of the negotiations being inclusive.

On 1 January 2015, NATO launched the Resolute Support Mission, a non-combat mission whose purpose is to help Afghan security forces and institutions develop the capabilities they need to defend Afghanistan and protect its citizens in a sustainable manner. In other words, its aim is to create conditions for the country's future successful development. Poland has been engaged in the Resolute Support Mission since its inception and has continued to increase its contribution. We are also proud to have participated in the operations of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), starting in 2002. The Polish military contingent in ISAF was one of its biggest and most successful. I would like to emphasize that our military efforts have always been complemented by our development assistance to Afghanistan, mostly through contributions to the multilateral assistance mechanisms of the United Nations system and the World Bank.

Another serious threat to the security of the wider region as well as Afghanistan is narcotics production. Despite the Afghan Government's efforts, drugs remain one of the largest sources of terrorists' income. It is therefore crucial to identify and coordinate both international and regional efforts to tackle that problem. We would like to thank the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia (UNRCCA) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for their hard work in addressing the issue of the production of narcotics, and we invite other regional organizations to coordinate their endeavours with them. At this point, I would like to emphasize support for UNRCCA's multidimensional approach to regional security in Afghanistan and Central Asia, including in the areas of transport, environment, food and energy security, and its focus on new threats to peace and security. Poland also greatly appreciates the work of UNAMA and the comprehensive support it provides to Afghanistan and its people.

Together with our partners in the European Union (EU), we have identified four priority areas that are critical to achieving progress in Afghanistan. They include promoting peace, stability and regional security, reinforcing democracy, the rule of law and human rights, promoting good governance and women's empowerment, and supporting economic and human development and addressing challenges related to migration. Those priorities are the pillars of the new EU strategy on Afghanistan and show our engagement and commitment to the country. We hope that the Afghan Government will work with us to implement that vital strategy.

In conclusion, I would like to underline that Poland has been a long-term partner of Afghanistan and the region. We remain committed to further strengthening peace, stability and the development of Afghanistan and Central Asia, and we are taking action to that end.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, I would like to highlight Kazakhstan's consistent and responsible approach to advancing issues that are priorities for Central Asia and its focus on solving specific problems facing the region.

We welcome the initiative of our friends from Kazakhstan in convening today's debate on an issue that is an urgent one for many countries and takes on particular significance against the backdrop of the growing terrorist and narcotic threats emanating from Afghanistan, which are having a destabilizing effect on Central Asia and spilling over its borders.

Northern Afghanistan is becoming a base of support for international terrorism, led by the Afghan wing of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, which is establishing a springboard for realizing its destructive ambitions in the region in the spirit of the caliphate's notorious ideology. With the flagrant collusion and sometimes direct support of both external and local sponsors, thousands of fighters of various nationalities are entering the region under the banner of ISIL, including jihadists who escaped defeat in Syria. They openly proclaim that their goal is overturning the legitimate Governments of Central Asian States and spreading their influence throughout Eurasia.

In the past year we saw unprecedented growth in Afghan narcotics production, as my Polish colleague just mentioned. It will be essential to take urgent measures to curb this threat, which fuels international terrorism, undermines the stability of States and the health of young people and triggers crime and corruption. The development of a comprehensive strategy to combat drug trafficking was the focus of an international conference of parliamentarians against drugs organized by the Russian State Duma in Moscow in December. We welcomed the participation in the conference of representatives from the United Nations, along with a host of Russian and international non-governmental organizations.

The situation in Afghanistan requires a comprehensive approach on the part of the States of the region and the international community as a whole. The experience of the past 20 years is vivid testament to the futility of attempts to use force to solve the problems plaguing Afghanistan. What is on the agenda is adopting practical measures to launch a process of national reconciliation on a basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions. Guided by those views, we have launched a dialogue in the Moscow format in conjunction with our partners and like-minded stakeholders, reviving the work of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Afghanistan Contact Group. We are building a partnership between Afghanistan and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. We welcome the initiative of Uzbekistan to convene a ministerial meeting this spring on a settlement of the Afghan settlement. We continue to assist Kabul in training national civilian and law-enforcement personnel to strengthen the military capabilities of the Afghan armed forces. We consistently advocate for starting direct talks as soon as possible between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban movement, based on criteria approved by the Security Council, in the interests of ending their fratricidal war.

As security issues are addressed, one of the major factors in stabilizing Afghanistan must be sustained socioeconomic development. Both the Eurasian Economic Union and the Commonwealth of Independent States can contribute to the general efforts by opening broad and promising markets in Afghanistan. Russia is open to multilateral cooperation in implementing major economic and infrastructure-based projects, including the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project and the Central Asia-South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade project.

At the heart of our alliance and strategic partnership with the Central Asian States is shared history, a high degree of mutual trust and unified approaches to major current issues. Our trade and economic ties provide a sound foundation. Russian investments in the region total $20 billion, with more than 7,500 Russian companies and joint ventures with Russian capital working productively in the area. During the past decade the aggregate volume of our assistance to Central Asian countries exceeded $6 billion, both bilaterally and through international organizations, including within the framework of the implementation of the Goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We believe that the region's issues regarding the energy supplies and access to water resources should be addressed through constructive dialogue and a mutual consideration of interests in the areas of hydropower and agriculture in order to benefit all the peoples of the region. The particular geographical location of Central Asian countries determines the importance of improving the effectiveness of making use of various forms of transportation for providing reliable trade and economic links with States in the Asia-Pacific region, including South Asia and Europe. Russia stands ready to contribute to that process through the development of East-West and North-South international corridors. In order to achieve that, we are working to establish a

single transit system through the Eurasian Economic Union and its Chinese counterpart, the Belt and Road Initiative. That approach will enable the Central Asian region to strengthen its role in the continental transportation system.

Eurasia today needs mutually beneficial cooperation based on a balance of interests. External actors should do everything they can to facilitate this without trying to drag the countries in the region into a zero-sum game, the notion of which appeared in the concept of a so-called greater Central Asia, which it seemed might happily have been forgotten but which has recently reared its head again. Central Asian countries should not be presented with a false choice between South and North. The region needs a constructive environment and partnership with all stakeholders, and certainly all its countries must respect all their obligations within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Eurasian Economic Community. The large-scale plans aimed ultimately at improving the well-being of the peoples of Central Asia and Afghanistan can become a reality only when there is lasting peace and stability throughout the Asian continent.

Russia has consistently worked to bring together efforts in the interests of establishing an architecture of equal and indivisible security that reflects contemporary realities in the Asia-Pacific region. The prospects for stability, peace and prosperity for States in the region are closely linked to the ongoing development of a fairer, more democratic and polycentric world order, based on international law and respect for the cultural and civilizational diversity of the peoples of the world.

Mr. Sullivan (United States of America): It is a pleasure to be here today. Before I continue, I would like to take this opportunity to express my condolences to the Governments of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and to the families of the victims of the tragic bus accident in Kazakhstan that claimed the lives of more than 50 Uzbek citizens yesterday.

On behalf of the United States, President Trump and Secretary Tillerson, I would like to thank Foreign Minister Abdrakhmanov for convening today's ministerial meeting on the exceedingly important topic of Afghanistan's security and development. I thank the Government of Kazakhstan for its leadership and for promoting stronger ties between Afghanistan and its neighbours in Central Asia. I would also like to express our appreciation to the Governments of the Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan for their joint and individual efforts to draw the region closer together through our partnership with the five Central Asian countries, as well as for their deliberations on how the region might more closely engage Afghanistan, thereby contributing to the region's shared stability.

I would also like to thank Secretary-General Guterres and his United Nations team, especially the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, for their dedication and exceptional work. The Secretary-General's visit to the country in June, as well as the Council's trip to Kabul last week, highlighted the international community's commitment to Afghanistan. I know that Ambassador Haley was impressed during her trip by the resilience of the Afghan people in the face of insurgent and extremist violence, as well as by Afghanistan's willingness to take ownership of its challenges. The United States is heartened by the progress that we are already seeing following the announcement of President Trump's South Asia strategy.

Before we turn to its challenges, we must not forget that Afghanistan is a fundamentally different country today from what it was 20 years ago. That should give the Taliban pause if it expects to roll back the progress that has been made. In Afghanistan today, millions of girls and boys attend school. The population has access to basic health services and 90 per cent of the population has cell-phone access. Citizens have dozens of independent radio and television stations to turn to for information and entertainment, as well as hundreds of print media outlets. Such advances instil confidence in the country's commitment to continuing progress in increasing development. Yet despite that progress, the ongoing conflict continues to roil the country, causing severe political, security, humanitarian and human rights challenges.

This year the stakes are clear. The Government of Afghanistan must continue to reform in order to foster better lives for Afghans of all ethnicities and to promote the country's long-term security and stability. It is critical to ensure that the preparations for parliamentary elections in 2018 and the presidential election in 2019 move forward on schedule, peacefully and democratically, and that the Government continues to work on its commitments to fighting corruption and supporting inclusive governance.

Since announcing our strategy for South Asia last August, President Trump has underscored that the United States will continue to support the Afghan Government and its security forces in their fight against the Taliban, as well as in their efforts to combat Al-Qaida, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) and other terrorist groups. The United States and our allies have suffered grave losses in this fight alongside our Afghan brothers and sisters. We will not allow Afghanistan to serve as a safe haven for terrorists, as it did before 11 September 2001. The President has also made it abundantly clear that solving Afghanistan's security and development challenges will depend on the commitment of Afghans themselves, together with the steadfast support of Afghanistan's regional and international partners. As we move ahead we must continue to support the principle that an enduring peace for Afghanistan is one that is built, led and ultimately maintained by the Afghan Government and its people. This Afghan-led and -owned approach, paired with firm international support for the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, will make it clear to the Taliban that victory cannot be won on the battlefield. Any solution must be political.

We have emphasized that our support is conditions-based and not driven by timelines. Continued violence will only serve to perpetuate war and thereby hurt all Afghan people, including the Taliban. With a united international community standing firm, the Taliban will come to understand that the only way forward is to engage in a reconciliation process that culminates in all parties working towards a tolerant, accountable and united Government of Afghanistan set in a peaceful and successful nation. A necessary outcome of any peace agreement must include an absolute commitment from the Taliban that it will cut ties to terrorism, cease violence and accept the Afghan Constitution, which includes protection for the rights of women and minorities.

We must recognize the reality that while the Afghan Government has been adamant about its interest in initiating peace talks with the Taliban, there has been no reciprocal interest on the part of the Taliban. That must change. To achieve that, we must all work together to isolate the Taliban, eliminate its sources of revenue and equipment and demonstrate with united and unwavering commitment that the only place it can achieve its objectives will be at the negotiating table, not on the battlefield. Unfortunately, the international community has so far fallen short in providing that kind of unified support to the Afghan Government. We have seen certain countries pursue counterproductive strategies that provide support to the Taliban in the name of countering ISIS. That approach is misguided or, worse, pernicious. The United States believes that the two are not linked. We can and must fight ISIS in Afghanistan while ensuring that the Taliban is forced to the negotiating table.

Working closely with our Afghan partners, we have made significant progress against ISIS in eastern Afghanistan. Together we have maintained persistent pressure on ISIS, significantly reducing its territory and eliminating one third of its fighters. Supporting the Taliban serves only to prolong the conflict and foster an unstable and insecure environment that ISIS exploits in order to threaten Afghanistan and the broader region.

Ultimately, if we are to defeat ISIS in Afghanistan and prevent the group's spread across the region, every country in this Chamber must be aligned in its strategy and commitment to following through. Ineffective strategies that enable insurgent groups must cease. Instead we need to join together and provide unwavering support for the Afghan Government.

We know that an important part of this unified approach is Pakistan, which has suffered grievously from the effects of terrorism. That country therefore can, and should be, an integral partner in our shared efforts to achieve peace and stability within the region. We seek to work cohesively and effectively with Pakistan, but cannot be successful if the status quo of terrorist organizations being given sanctuary inside the country's borders is allowed to continue. Stability and prosperity in Afghanistan would benefit Pakistan as well, since it would enable the return of refugees and remove the ability of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and other terrorist groups to operate against Pakistan from outside the country.

That is why Pakistan should join our efforts to bring about a resolution to the conflict, as spelled out in our South Asia strategy. The strategy, as I have outlined it today, will prove successful with commitment and patience. As Afghans take ownership, as the international community isolates the Taliban, then peace, stability and security will follow, as well development. As Afghanistan stands taller through peace, it will naturally contribute to the larger regional, economic and security environment underpinning the

long-term success of Central Asia. The United States shares with the countries of Central Asia a commitment to peace, stability and prosperity. The only way we can achieve those goals is through a mutual understanding of the threats we confront and the opportunities we can cultivate together.

In conclusion, the United States welcomes the Council and the Secretary-General's recognition that peace, progress and development is ultimately attained through regional and international cooperation. We all have a stake in Afghanistan's success. Increased stability, economic progress and regional integration will benefit every country represented in this Chamber, and none more so than the countries in Afghanistan's immediate neighbourhood. But it must start with the Taliban deciding to take their first steps towards peace. If we hold firm and present a united front, we will come ever closer to the day when the promise of peace becomes a reality.

Mr. Haspels (Netherlands): It is an honour for me to address the Security Council for the first time since the Kingdom of the Netherlands began its 2018 membership. Right before I entered the Chamber this morning, I spoke with two of Afghanistan's leading citizens — Roya Mahboob and her sister Elaha. They founded an organization to teach Afghan girls programming and robotics. Both of the girls are present here today, sitting high up there in the gallery. Roya, Elaha and their students are a living example of what has been achieved in Afghanistan. Thanks to their organization, Afghan girls today can study in Herat, where they are learning to build robots for hospitals and farms.

The difference between today and the Taliban era could not be greater. Back then, women were marginalized to the point of complete invisibility. Today, they can study, travel, make films and build robots. Since the fall of the brutal Taliban regime, a lot has been achieved. In only 16 years, life has improved greatly in Afghanistan.

But when we spoke, Roya and her sister reminded me of the many obstacles Afghans still face. The security situation is still volatile. Access to justice is limited. There are still barriers to girls who want to go to school. Insecurity and corruption are hampering economic growth. As a result, Afghans are seeking shelter and opportunity elsewhere.

That is one of the reasons why the Kingdom of the Netherlands supports Afghanistan in its efforts to improve the lives of its people. We chose an integrated approach — combining military, development and political efforts; investing in security, good governance, the rule of law and accountability — together with other countries, partners and, of course, Afghans themselves.

Our contribution to peace and security in Afghanistan has sometimes involved painful sacrifices. We will remember those who paid the ultimate prize with great respect.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan plays a key role in coordinating the many elements of the international effort in Afghanistan. As a penholder on Afghanistan in the Council, we look forward to working with all members to ensure that the United Nations can continue to play its essential role after March.

But in the long run, true stability in Afghanistan can be guaranteed only through an inclusive peace and reconciliation process that is Afghan-led and -owned. The Kabul Process meeting in February must bring us closer to that goal. It is paramount that all neighbouring countries take up their responsibilities by actively contributing to that goal.

At the same time, we encourage the Afghan Government to continue on the path of reform, to continue the fight against corruption, to strengthen good governance and the rule of law and to uphold human rights and hold timely and credible elections — because only a secure and stable Afghanistan can offer the Afghan people the opportunities they so deserve.

That is what today's debate is all about: the need to achieve long-term peace, stability and development in Afghanistan. In that regard, the region also has an important role to play. I commend the Republic of Kazakhstan and other Central Asian nations for their efforts to increase regional cooperation, especially where economic ties are concerned.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Kazakhstan for arranging this highly topical debate, I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and I thank Minister Karzai of Afghanistan for his Government's leadership.

Roya and Elaha remind us that we need to invest in young Afghans. After all, the future stability of the country will depend upon the prospects that Afghanistan can offer them. We all have a responsibility

here. The Kingdom of the Netherlands will remain a committed partner, both during our term on the Council and beyond.

Mr. Field (United Kingdom): I commend you, Mr. President, for your leadership, your foresight and diplomacy in convening this important and timely debate. I also thank the Secretary-General for his insightful briefing. As many have observed during the course of this debate, regional partnerships are crucial to achieving long-term peace and security. That is particularly important when we consider the future prosperity of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is making genuine sustainable progress in overcoming its many challenges. I saw that myself when I visited Kabul only three months ago. The international community has a crucial role to play in encouraging and promoting that progress, as do the regional partnerships and the initiatives that have been discussed here today. We warmly welcome the efforts under way to improve the links between Afghanistan and its regional partners in South and Central Asia. I believe that is critical to achieving greater economic development in Afghanistan, which of course is an essential factor for long-term stability. Such cooperation will help find common economic interests to reduce frictions and provide further avenues for resolving disputes.

The Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project is a great example of the benefits of this type of regional cooperation. Afghanistan and its neighbours have worked together and alongside the international community to overcome significant challenges, bringing that important endeavour to the point of implementation. We are confident that much more regional cooperation will now follow. There is a clear appetite for it within some of the most important regional groups, such as in the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan and the Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference. I believe that today's meeting is an important opportunity to demonstrate the Council's wholehearted support for that type of cooperation.

However, there is still a long way to go before Afghanistan's Government and people achieve their goal of building a more stable and prosperous country. The United Kingdom will continue to play our part within the international community in supporting that goal. We have committed up to £750 million for the four years up to 2020 to help support the Afghan Government's work to improve security, reduce poverty and increase broad access to health and education. We are also working closely with in NATO to support Afghanistan. Our non-combat troops have played a crucial role in supporting the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. Through the National Army Officer Academy, we have helped to train over 3,000 cadets — Afghanistan's military leaders of the future.

But ultimately, I am sure that, as others have done, or will do, during the course of this debate, the solution to long-term peace and stability lies not within the military but in a peace process that is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. That is why the forthcoming meeting of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation is so very important. We encourage all of Afghanistan's regional partners to fully support those efforts towards peace. It takes vision, courage and leadership to begin a conversation with your adversary after years of violence and bloodshed. However, the time is now surely ripe for that conversation. The people of Afghanistan deserve peace. We therefore urge President Ghani and the Government to use the meeting to reach out to the insurgents and to try to launch a credible peace process. All of us here today should collectively and individually express our full support for this peace process, which is vital to Afghanistan's long-term stability.

Credible, inclusive and timely elections are also essential. We commend the work of various United Nations bodies in helping the Government to prepare for parliamentary and presidential elections this year and next.

In conclusion, Afghanistan continues to face a number of significant challenges in 2018, but this is also a year of real opportunity. With timely elections and the launch of a credible political and peace process, this year has the potential to be the one that Afghanistan finally and irreversible turns a corner. However, as the United States Deputy Secretary of State so rightly pointed out, the commitment to this must be conditions-based, and not driven by timelines. We need, at times, to be patient. That is in everyone's interests — most of all that of the Afghan people, who have waited so very long peace. Let us therefore all pledge today to do everything we can within the Security Council and beyond to support the efforts to bring about that peace and stability.

Mr. Mituy Edjang (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I convey to everyone warm greetings and a happy new year on behalf of His Excellency President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea. The Government of Equatorial Guinea expresses its gratitude to the United Nations and to the Government of Kazakhstan for having jointly organized this high-level meeting on Afghanistan and Central Asia. We also thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his briefing, as well as the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan for his statement later in this meeting.

This meeting reflects the strategic importance and specific role of Afghanistan and Central Asia as a whole and the importance the international community attaches to them. We firmly believe that this region has great potential for development and the resources required to achieve it, but that will also require the contributions, collaboration and cooperation of all. The international community must therefore continue supporting the efforts of the Afghan Government to achieve stability, security and sustainable and lasting development.

The endemic security problems and their ramifications are the main obstacle to achieving that goal. As today's agenda indicates, security and development are closely linked. The commitment of all the States of Central Asia to the development of Afghanistan requires their cooperation on security.

A regional approach is required in order to address the problem jointly. Equatorial Guinea condemns the existence of safe havens for terrorists in the region, which are used for training and preparing attacks — not only in Afghanistan but all around the world. The support of the international community for such an approach is crucial, including on the part of the most developed countries and of the United Nations.

Equatorial Guinea welcomes the approach of Afghanistan's Central Asian regional neighbours, which view the country as a partner but also believe that Afghans themselves must lead an internal peace process to bring about prosperity and stability for the country, and must enjoy the support of the countries of the region because, as has been shown, there can be no regional stability without a stable Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's security and stability are important for the entire region, as we continue to see worrying and increasing terrorist activities carried out by associated persons, groups, business and entities in Afghanistan that pose serious threats not only to Afghanistan but to all countries in Central Asia.

The United Nations as a whole has an important role to play in those efforts. We are happy to see that, as a result of the support and activities of the United Nations Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and regional organizations, the region has strengthened capacities to overcome challenges to peace, stability and sustainable development, including in such areas as the fight against terrorism, transnational organized crime, the fight against drug trafficking, trafficking in persons, illegal immigration and the use of the Internet for terrorism.

A key consideration for lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan is the need to accelerate social and economic development in order to improve the living standards of the population. The international community must redouble its efforts to support the Afghan Government in implementing the Afghanistan Compact and the national development strategy so as to make progress in economic development and in improving infrastructure, education, health, human rights, the rule of law and other areas. It must be ensured that the dividends of development are beneficial to, and shared by, the entire Afghan people.

The adoption of an integrated approach is crucial to combat opium cultivation and drug trafficking. The issue of drugs impacts negatively not only on Afghanistan's economy, livelihoods, security and stability, but also on the capacity of the Government, as well as on the customs and beliefs of its people. We hope that the Afghan Government will tackle the problem thoroughly in coordination and cooperation with its neighbours and the international community, and that it will intensify its efforts in the fight against drugs with comprehensive measures.

The role of Afghanistan's neighbours in the region is crucial and, together with the international community, they should continue their efforts to fulfil their commitments and support the Afghan Government and people. Equatorial Guinea calls for continued assistance to the country while respecting the interests, desires and specific characteristics of the Afghan people. Afghanistan's development is tied to the development of the whole of Central Asia. We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our gratitude to

Kazakhstan for its initiative in organizing this public debate, as well as for the remarkable trip to Kabul by all 15 members of the Security Council during which a consensus was reached on supporting Afghanistan in its efforts to achieve development and to normalize its situation. I would also like to commend the hospitality and warm welcome that all of us, including Equatorial Guinea, received from the Afghan Government.

In conclusion, Equatorial Guinea accepts and supports the presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/2) adopted at this meeting and believes that its publication will help to promote development, stability and peace in Afghanistan and the Central Asian region.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China): The delegation of China would like to welcome Foreign Minister Abdrakhmanov and thank him for convening today's debate. We are also grateful to the Secretary-General for his briefing.

In the current context, ensuring peace and stability in Afghanistan is crucial to the vital interests and long-term welfare of the Afghan people as well as to the security, development and prosperity of the region as a whole. Central Asia is generally stable and has enormous development potential. China supports the quest for solutions from a regional perspective and the adoption of a comprehensive approach, with a view to achieving lasting peace and shared development in Afghanistan and Central Asia. We appreciate the Afghan Government's efforts to maintain national stability, facilitate national reconciliation and promote economic development, and we value the important role played in dealing with the issue of Afghanistan by its neighbours and other relevant countries of the region, including those in Central Asia. However, we have to keep in mind the fact that Afghanistan is still facing many political, security and economic challenges, and that the international community should continue to provide it with staunch support.

First, all the parties must remain committed to promoting a settlement of the Afghanistan issue through political dialogue and reconciliation. All stakeholders in Afghanistan should work to strengthen their unity and actively participate in reconciliation, making the long-term interests and welfare of the people their top priority. The international community should continue to promote efforts to achieve a broad, inclusive political reconciliation that is Afghan-led and -owned, and encourage the relevant actors in Afghanistan to launch peace talks as soon as possible, as well as welcoming all assistance provided by countries of the region and relevant mechanisms. The international community should also fully respect the Afghan people's right to independently choose their own political system and development path, and should support the Government in increasing its capacity to govern.

Secondly, maintaining peace and stability is the foundation of Afghanistan's national reconstruction and development. The international community should continue to support the capacity-building of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, enhance the country's independent self-defence capabilities and work together to effectively address the threats posed by terrorism, transnational crime and narcotics trafficking. While efforts at the regional level are essential to assisting Afghanistan in responding to such challenges, promoting the achievement of peace and stability there can also contribute to improving the security situation in Central Asia and the region as a whole. The international community should enhance its cooperation and coordination in fighting terrorist elements in the region, avoid finger-pointing and support the important role played by entities such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in regional counter-terrorism efforts.

Thirdly, integration into regional economies is ultimately the way forward for Afghanistan in the areas of peace and reconstruction. The countries of Central Asia and the wider region are close neighbours of Afghanistan and share interests with the Afghan people where regional development is concerned. Development in Afghanistan cannot be achieved without the support and assistance of those countries, while in turn prosperity for the region as a whole will not be possible without the economic development of Afghanistan. Stability and development in the region are in the common interests of Afghanistan and its neighbours. China hopes that the relevant countries will strengthen their cooperation and work together for peace and prosperity in the region. The international community should make active efforts to fulfil its pledges of assistance and support the Afghan Government's efforts to promote economic and social development. In accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, all parties should work to build a community with a shared future for humankind, in the spirit of win-win cooperation, and promote the development and regional cooperation of Afghanistan and Central Asia through the Belt and

Road Initiative and other endeavours aimed at regional cooperation on the economic and trade fronts.

As a friendly neighbour of Afghanistan, China has been playing a constructive role in promoting its peace and development. On 26 December last year in Beijing, our Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, convened and chaired the first dialogue between the Foreign Ministers of China, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Its purpose is, first, to help Afghanistan and Pakistan improve and develop their relations; secondly, to support the peace, reconstruction and reconciliation process in Afghanistan; thirdly, to enhance trilateral cooperation on security and work jointly to combat terrorism; and fourthly, to promote international cooperation on the One and Road Initiative and explore effective ways to achieve trilateral connectivity and economic integration. The three Foreign Ministers agreed on three major themes — mutual political trust and reconciliation, development and connectivity, and cooperation on security and counter-terrorism. The trilateral cooperation will focus on those three areas. They also reached consensus on a number of important issues in areas related to people's livelihoods, such as health, human resources and agriculture.

China stands ready to cooperate with the international community in working tirelessly for peace, stability and development in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I would like to align myself with the statement to be delivered later by the observer of the European Union (EU).

I would like to thank you and your country, Mr. President, for taking the initiative to bring the comprehensive issue of regional cooperation and the links between security and development in Central Asia and Afghanistan to the attention of the Security Council. I also welcome the participation in today's meeting of such senior-level ministers from other Central Asian States, and we are very pleased to have young Afghan women, the future leaders of Afghanistan, here in the Chamber as well. I also want to compliment Ambassador Kairat Umarov for the excellent visit to Afghanistan this weekend that he and his team organized for the Security Council, and to thank the Government of Afghanistan for hosting us.

We welcome the Secretary-General's briefing this morning, as well as his steadfast commitment to preventive diplomacy and sustainable development, including in Central Asia.

We commend all of the countries of Central Asia for their efforts to invigorate and strengthen regional cooperation, including with Afghanistan. Such concrete steps as resolving long-standing border issues, easing border crossings, strengthening people-to-people contacts and lower barriers to trade are very welcome. Those actions serve as recognition of the fact that each country is better off if its neighbours also prosper.

Long-term peace and economic development for the individual countries of the region are intimately linked to regional security and development. The countries of Central Asia have seen progress on multiple fronts since independence 25 years ago, not least in poverty reduction and steady economic growth, and, as we see from Kazakhstan's membership on the Council, Central Asian States are playing an increasingly important role on the world stage.

Remaining challenges, many of which are common to the countries of the region, can be overcome through stronger regional cooperation. They include security threats and radicalization, managing shared water and energy resources and addressing the effects of climate change. Efforts are also needed to strengthen good governance, create jobs for a rapidly growing population, develop interconnectivity and reduce barriers to trade. Through regional cooperation those challenges can be overcome and transformed into mutually beneficial opportunities for the countries of the region, thereby creating a zone of peace, cooperation and prosperity that benefits all of the people of Central Asia as well as Afghanistan.

As we have heard many times in this Chamber in recent months, interconnected security challenges require joint and comprehensive approaches that integrate security, development and human rights. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides the blueprint for such an approach. We welcome the firm commitment of the Central Asian countries to the Sustainable Development Goals and their inclusion in their respective development strategies. As member of the European Union, we are contributing to a strong and durable relationship between the countries of the region and the European Union aimed at fostering prosperous, sustainable and stable socioeconomic development. That includes efforts to facilitate trade and increased connectivity, as well as to continue the EU's long-standing support for border management in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

The road to regional progress runs through a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan, something which is in everyone's interest. However, many of the challenges facing Afghanistan cannot be dealt with in isolation. Therefore, a clear commitment from regional actors and their constructive engagement is critical to a peaceful Afghanistan. Greater economic and political cooperation and integration are essential for the future of both that country and the wider region. We urge all stakeholders, especially Afghanistan's neighbours, to assume responsibility and work together towards a political settlement. Every country in the region stands to gain if there is peace in Afghanistan.

The only viable option to reach such a settlement is an inclusive Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process, which was confirmed once again during our visit last week. We welcome the Afghan Government's peace efforts, and we call on the Taliban to engage in a dialogue with the Government. We look forward to the upcoming meeting of the Kabul Process. The Security Council has an important responsibility to contribute and be responsive to creating an environment conducive to peace.

Respect for human rights is vital to achieving that peace. It is also essential that all parties in society be included. The economic empowerment and meaningful participation of women and girls in all political processes, including future peace efforts and negotiations, is a precondition for sustainable development. The Council's meeting with women's representatives last week reinforced those points.

The holding of inclusive, credible and transparent elections is a fundamental step in the consolidation of democracy in Afghanistan and is essential for future stability. It is imperative that the parliamentary and presidential elections take place as planned. We call on the electoral management bodies and on the Afghan Government to accelerate efforts to ensure that elections take place and that they be free and fair. We encourage them to take all the necessary steps to ensure women's participation, both as voters and as candidates.

As a steadfast partner to Afghanistan, we commit to doing our part through long-term engagement on State-building and peacebuilding in the country. With a view to contributing to sustainable, peaceful and economic development, our efforts include a $1 billion development-assistance commitment from 2015 to 2024, which includes humanitarian assistance, capacity-building, dialogue and mediation training for local female activists. We also contribute to NATO's Resolute Support Mission.

The United Nations should play an active role in supporting regional efforts in Central Asia and Afghanistan. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) provides important support for efforts to achieve lasting peace, a role that would be further enhanced by implementing the strategic review. Increased cooperation and coordination among the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia and UNAMA and other relevant United Nations agencies and regional organizations will further enhance the impact of United Nations support.

We commend the important work by the Regional Centre — represented in the Chamber today by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Natalia Gherman — and by UNAMA in promoting regional dialogue and conflict prevention. We would like to highlight in particular the laudable work regarding capacity-building in water diplomacy and modernizing the legal framework for managing natural resources. As pointed out by the Secretary-General, managing shared water resources that are fundamental to economic development can build trust and lead to greater investments. In turn, that is an important contributor to, and incentive for, sustaining peace in the region.

The Security-Council's visit to Afghanistan allowed us to take stock of progress and hear at first hand about the many challenges the country still faces. However, we also heard of the aspirations of all Afghans to build a better future. Becoming a connected and integrated part of the Central Asian region was central to that vision. All of the countries of the region, as well as Afghanistan's partners beyond the region, have a common interest in supporting these efforts.

I thank you very much for your leadership, Mr. President.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking Kazakhstan for its initiative in convening this important meeting and, more generally, for placing Central Asia and Afghanistan at the heart of the Security Council's attention in the month of January. As the Council has just returned from Kabul, this meeting is an opportunity to reaffirm the importance that we collectively attach to the security

and development of that region of the world. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

France aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union. I shall confine myself to three main points.

My first point concerns the situation in Afghanistan. As I said, the Security Council has just visited Kabul, a first since 2010. On behalf of France, I would like to thank the Afghan authorities for their hospitality and to commend their determination as they pursue the democratic consolidation of the country.

The very high level of insecurity and violence in Afghanistan remains a major source of concern for France. Armed clashes and repeated terrorist attacks continue to seriously destabilize the entire country. In that regard, France shares the determination of the Afghan authorities and of our allies to combat terrorism, including its financing. In addition to the need to pursue ongoing reforms aimed at achieving governance that is more effective and better able to serve the population and strengthen the rule of law, France encourages Afghanistan to focus on two priorities in 2018.

The first priority is the conduct of free and transparent local and parliamentary elections. Progress has been made in that area, and preparations for the parliamentary elections have been initiated by the competent authorities, in particular the Government and the Independent Electoral Commission. France encourages the Afghan authorities to continue their efforts, with the support of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), to ensure an inclusive and credible electoral process. In that regard, the full participation of women in electoral processes, both as voters and as candidates, will be essential.

The second priority is to reinvigorate momentum towards an Afghan-led peace process. That requires relaunching the inter-Afghan dialogue, but also a sincere commitment and unambiguous support for peace from all of Afghanistan's neighbours. We call on everyone to make a renewed effort in that direction and make concrete commitments. France has noted the announcement of a new meeting of the Kabul Process at the end of February and hopes that the meeting will bring together existing initiatives under the authority of the Afghan Government.

Those are the two immediate priorities. But we must certainly not lose sight of the fragility of the humanitarian situation, particularly the case of refugees, as well as the very precarious situation of women and children, who remain, it should be recalled, the first victims of the conflict.

My second point pertains to cooperation between Afghanistan and Central Asia, which is not only necessary but also replete with great opportunities. France thanks Kazakhstan for taking the initiative of drafting a presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/2) that for the first time highlights the special ties linking Afghanistan and Central Asia, as well as the opportunities that they represent for the economic development and security of the region. Afghanistan and Central Asia in fact share many common challenges, all of which involve areas where stronger regional cooperation is needed.

In the area of security, I would mention preventing radicalization, in particular of young people and, more generally, combating terrorism and its financing. With regard to combating drug trafficking, which continues to fuel the Taliban insurgency, trafficking encourages corruption and poses a major public health risk to Afghanistan and the neighbouring countries. In that regard, the Paris Pact initiative, a partnership that includes Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries, remains a unique framework for exchange among all countries affected by narcotics produced in Afghanistan.

In the area of economic development, it is essential that Afghanistan be able to benefit from its geographical location in the heart of Asia. Its increasing involvement in multiple projects to increase connectivity between Afghanistan and Central Asia, as well as in various other forms of regional cooperation, must be encouraged.

Energy and transportation are two key sectors in that regard. As Afghanistan is one of the primary sufferers from global warming, which causes severe drought, it is fortunate that the region is endowed with great potential for developing renewable energy, including hydraulic, solar and wind resources. France encourages regional partners to invest in those energy sources and to green their economies. In Central Asia as elsewhere, it is important to continue to foster a comprehensive approach linking security and development goals as part of the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

My third, and last, point concerns the support of the international community, especially the United Nations, for Afghanistan and Central Asia. That support comes not only from UNAMA and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, but also from all United Nations agencies that are working to strengthen the stability and development of the region. I should like to reaffirm France's full support for the work of United Nations in the region and to encourage increased cooperation between UNAMA and the United Nations Centre for Preventive Diplomacy. Security Council consultations scheduled for next Monday, 22 January, concerning the activities of the Centre, and the upcoming renewal of UNAMA's mandate in March will provide opportunities to further elaborate on how the United Nations can continue to support Afghanistan and Central Asia.

For its part, France will continue to cooperate closely with Afghanistan and Central Asian countries on major international issues, beginning with combating terrorism, in a bilateral framework, as well as through the European Union, which today is a major partner for the region. France will also continue to support the modernization of those countries in all areas and to work resolutely to strengthen our links.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a privilege to have His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan preside over this meeting. Bolivia commends the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kazakhstan not only for having organized this debate, but also for its leadership in drafting today's presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/2) and for the trip to Kabul during its presidency. We take this opportunity to acknowledge and express our thanks for the hospitality of the people of Afghanistan during the Security Council's visit. We also acknowledge the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. The importance of this meeting is also illustrated by the presence of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, to whom I convey my deepest respect.

Bolivia is pleased by the significant progress made in preventive diplomacy as a result of strengthening relations between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the countries of Central Asia. We believe that such expressions of mutual trust are a clear sign of the determination of their authorities to continue the process that seeks to ensure peace and development for the Afghan people and other peoples of the region. We encourage the efforts that the Afghan Government has carried out to promote mechanisms and platforms for regional, interregional and international cooperation to bring about peace, stability and long-term sustainable development in that country and its neighbours in Central Asia, as set out in the presidential statement we adopted today.

We hope that the current fragile stability in Afghanistan will improve so that a stable environment can be established in order that future elections can be transparent and inclusive. We also believe that all work facilitating dialogue and cooperation between Afghanistan and Central Asia must continue, above all because such work fosters the achievement of the shared goals of economic and social development conducive to prosperity in the region. In that context, national, subregional and regional initiatives are very positive, as are actions to promote connectivity in trade policies, finance and infrastructure improvement, as will as trade among Afghanistan, Central Asian countries and other regions.

In that connection, it is important to acknowledge that the lack of territorial access to the sea, exacerbated by the distance to global markets and the high costs and risks associated with transit, imposes serious restrictions on export revenues, the inflow of private capital and the mobilization of domestic resources of landlocked developing countries, specifically those of Central Asia.

Bolivia expresses its satisfaction with the outcome of the seventh Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, held in Ashgaba on 14 and 15 November 2017. Both the host country and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, together with 67 other countries, had an opportunity to present important initiatives concerning energy and natural resources, connectivity, regional trade, private-sector development, cooperation among businesses and labour's support for the inclusion of women in economic activities in general.

In that connection, Bolivia believes that subregional, regional, interregional and international projects, platforms and programmes must be based on unequivocal respect for the sovereignty of the Afghan people over their natural resources. In a context in which the international community seeks to restore the

rightful place of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in international politics, the United Nations and the Security Council must stand as the guarantors of the sovereignty of that country.

Bolivia takes note of the meeting held in the Beijing on 27 December 2017, in which, under the auspices of the host country, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan reached important bilateral agreements through which both States demonstrated their willingness to improve their bilateral relations with a view to achieving harmonious coexistence and systematically resolving their concerns through dialogue and comprehensive consultations. We commend the important role of the Government of China, which is constructively promoting the rapprochement between the two countries through a trilateral dialogue and strengthening cooperation in the political, economic and security areas.

On the other hand, Bolivia is deeply concerned about the persistent presence of terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaida and Da'esh, in the subregion. We emphasize the importance of the participation of Afghanistan in regional Central Asia mechanisms in order to cooperate in combating terrorism. In that regard, we fully support the efforts under the joint plan of action for the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia. We believe that every effort to end the threat of terrorism in Afghanistan will be essential to ensuring definitive peace and security.

We also believe that it is necessary to combat illegal armed groups and those involved in the production, trafficking and illicit trade of drugs. The threat to stability and security in Afghanistan will continue as long as the illegal activities of those groups continue.

Finally, Bolivia is convinced that the only way to achieve sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan is through a negotiated solution through constructive collaboration and diplomatic efforts in the interests of all Afghans and for their well-being. We therefore call upon all countries of the region to continue to strengthen their commitment with strong cooperation. We believe that there is no military solution to the situation in Afghanistan. We welcome any initiative at inclusive dialogue that respects the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan. It is for that reason that we fully support the Kabul Process under the leadership of the Government of Afghanistan, which seeks to achieve peace, security and sustainability for the country in order to benefit all Afghans.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire thanks the presidency of Kazakhstan for convening this ministerial-level debate on the issue of peace, security and development in Central Asia and Afghanistan, which is a source of major concern to the Security Council and to all the States of Central Asia, and beyond. I would like to welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, who is presiding over our work today, and the other Ministers and Vice-Ministers and State Secretaries in attendance today.

I would also like to pay tribute to Afghanistan for allowing the Council to see at first-hand the situation on the ground in that great country. I take this opportunity to thank the Afghan Government for its welcome and hospitality.

I would also like to commend the Secretary-General on his informative briefing on today's agenda item.

The subject of today's meeting serves to highlight the close link between security and development in a regional context strongly dominated by major security concerns. That issue, which is of a global scale, is at the core of the Afghan crisis, which has lasted for 30 years and is markedly regional and global in nature. A global solution must therefore be put forward.

The situation in Afghanistan elicits serious concerns because of the complexity of security, economic and humanitarian challenges facing the country. The Security Council must therefore support the various national, regional and international initiatives to create the conditions necessary for peace and stability, which are essential for economic prosperity. In that context, it is important to understand the stakes and the challenges to the stabilization of Afghanistan in three aspects: political and security, economic, and regional and international.

In political and security terms, the conflict in Afghanistan is a breeding ground for terrorism in all its forms. The increasing level of terrorist activities carried out by the Taliban and the Afghan faction of the Islamic State in the country's various provinces contributes to the ongoing degradation of the security situation, with clear repercussions in the entire region. That situation of ongoing insecurity urgently calls for the strengthening of the international community's

capacity to curb the level of violence in the country. Against that backdrop, Côte d'Ivoire reminds all parties to the conflict of their responsibility to protect civilians during military operations and requests that additional measures be taken to reduce the number of civilian victims.

My country reaffirms the major role that the Security Council must play vis-à-vis the Afghan Government, with a view to reviving and taking ownership of the national reconciliation process. The Ivoirian Government therefore welcomes the adoption of the Afghan national strategy for peace and reconciliation presented by the High Peace Council, as well as the measures taken by the Government to implement the national action plan on peace, security and the promotion of women's rights.

Côte d'Ivoire also underscores the importance of the upcoming legislative and presidential elections and strongly encourages the Afghan authorities to do their utmost to ensure that the elections take place as scheduled in a peaceful environment and with the participation of all Afghans.

In addition to the points already I have mentioned, regional cooperation should contribute by pooling the means to combat, and glean information about, illicit trafficking, money laundering and the trafficking in weapons, with a view to eliminating those scourges.

At the economic level, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the progress made by the Afghan Government in combating corruption and reducing its dependence on foreign aid, and encourages it to continue its efforts to combat drug trafficking, which is a source of terrorist financing. In the face of the growing phenomenon of drug trafficking, the international community must press for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to combat that scourge in all its forms.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the development of economic cooperation in Central Asia and urges Afghanistan and its neighbours to promote economic integration. In that regard, Afghanistan's geographic location between the energy-supplying countries of Central Asia and the energy-consuming countries of South Asia is an undeniable asset.

At the regional and international levels, the challenges to be met require a regional and global approach. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire urges neighbouring countries to cooperate for the stabilization of Afghanistan and to promote regional cooperation and economic development. My country reaffirms its support for the Kabul Process, which provides a comprehensive framework for the Afghan Government and its regional partners to arrive at a political solution and lasting peace in the country. We therefore call on the States of Central Asia and on Afghanistan to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The Ivoirian Government calls for the participation of all Afghan parties, including the Taliban, in the next meeting of the political process, scheduled for February. We reaffirm the need to improve border control and information-sharing among competent national organizations in view of the issue of the return of foreign terrorist fighters, who now constitute a new threat to peace and security.

Côte d'Ivoire also welcomes the efforts of United Nations agencies in Central Asia and Afghanistan, which help the country regain peace and reinvigorate development, so as to contribute to the prosperity of Central Asia. My country is in favour of strengthened cooperation and coordination between the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, as well as the relevant regional organizations, so as to build the region's capacity to surmount the challenges hampering the restoration of peace, stability and development in this important and resource-rich part of our planet.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation commends Kazakhstan's initiative to convene this important debate on security, development and regional partnerships in Afghanistan and Central Asia. We welcome your presence, Mr. Minister, as well as that of the Ministers from the Central Asian region. We also thank the Secretary-General for his presentation this morning.

As has been noted, we have just returned this week from a visit to Afghanistan that has made it possible for us to better grasp the issues facing the country and their regional and global implications in an increasingly interdependent world. Here we would like to thank the people and the Government of Afghanistan for their hospitality and to reiterate to them our support in the achievement of sustainable peace in the country. Based on our national experience, we underscore the importance of linking security and development in the

framework of a broad and integrated approach, with the support of the international community, especially neighbouring countries.

Here I should like to make three points.

First, tackling the deep-rooted causes of the conflict in Afghanistan is a task that goes beyond the realm of peace and security. It involves investing in the sustainable development of a country with a very young population, with an average age of 18 years, and a poverty rate of approximately 39 per cent, a state of affairs that is exploited by extremist groups and various criminal organizations. In this respect, we support the conclusions of the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan on the need to concentrate efforts, in addition to maintaining internal stability, on achieving sustainable peace and reducing the external dependence of Afghanistan. International and regional cooperation can do a great deal in this respect by supporting the efforts of the Afghans themselves to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Investment in infrastructure projects and regional connectivity projects given priority by the national authorities could have the potential of preventing greater conflicts.

We believe that, in accordance with SDG 16, the rule of law and the consolidation of transparent, accountable and inclusive institutions are key elements in promoting a peaceful society. In that connection, we underscore the consensus of the members of the Council regarding the importance of complying with the electoral programme established for Afghanistan, including the election of an inclusive and representative parliament in 2018 and a new Government in 2019.

Secondly, it is vital to confront terrorism on the basis of a broad and comprehensive approach that, in addition to focusing on its root causes, takes account of its links with transnational organized crime and the global issue of drugs from a regional perspective. We are concerned that, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Afghanistan's production of opium and poppies has increased 87 per cent and 63 per cent, respectively, compared with the previous year, which channels additional resources to groups that promote violence.

It is imperative to confront this issue at its various stages, including the eradication of illicit crops, access to precursors, the social implications of consumption, and prevention programmes. International cooperation is required, including triangular and bilateral regional cooperation with neighbouring countries. Our experience in dealing with similar challenges has shown that alternative development programmes have been particularly effective for those segments of the population involved in drug production. We are prepared to share our experience with the Afghan authorities.

Thirdly, regional partnerships in their various forms can do a great deal to enhance the collective security, development and stability of their members.

I should like here briefly to refer to the experience of the Latin American region, which could be useful for other developing regions. With the Treaty of Tlatelolco, we were pioneers in declaring ourselves a zone free of nuclear weapons. It is also the first zone of peace in the world. Thanks to peace and various integration and partnership processes, in recent decades our region has registered significant rates of growth and a considerably reduced poverty rate.

Integration with neighbours and cross-border development have given the process added impetus, especially with the periodic bilateral meetings between the respective Heads of State, with the participation of ministers. We therefore welcome the fact that Afghanistan and the States of Central Asia are moving in a similar direction, with a view to transforming the area into a zone of peace, cooperation and prosperity, as reflected in the Treaty declaring Central Asia a nuclear-weapon-free zone. In addition, we believe that the trade integration and territorial connectivity promoted by the Afghan Government and the States of Central Asia will become pillars of stability and prosperity for the subregion, as was the case at the time of the Silk Road. As the old Eastern proverb says, alone you can go quickly, but together you can go farther.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We once again express appreciation to the Kazakh presidency for having convened this important debate on building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development.

Coming as it does on the heels of the recent Security Council mission to Afghanistan, this debate also affords us an opportunity to reflect on our visit. We are pleased to see you again, Mr. Minister, presiding over this meeting, which demonstrates the importance that the Kazakh presidency attaches to the situation in Afghanistan and Central Asia and to the nexus between security and development.

We thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing on the overall situation in the region.

The situation in Afghanistan was discussed last month during the quarterly debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), but what is different this time around is that this discussion is taking place after our very recent visit to Afghanistan, which we found very useful and productive.

We were indeed able to express solidarity with the people and the Government of Afghanistan and better appreciate the many complex peace and security challenges that the country continues to face, as well as the real potential it has for renewal and for contributing not only to regional security but also to development. Ensuring peace and stability, fighting terrorism and violent extremism, promoting dialogue and reconciliation, fostering good governance and the role of law, conducting parliamentary and district elections, and promoting inclusive growth and development are some of the most topical issues that we discussed with the Afghan leadership as well as a number of other important stakeholders.

It was very clear to us that Afghanistan continues to require comprehensive, sustained and coordinated support from the international community in all these areas. The fact that the country needs and deserves such support was lost on none of the Council members in the mission.

The discussions we have had on the situation in Afghanistan here in the Council cannot be said to have paid adequate attention to the regional dimension. What is different today is that we are considering the situation, perhaps for the first time, from the regional perspective. Indeed, the situation in Afghanistan cannot be seen in isolation from the peace, security and development of the Central Asian region.

There is no doubt that a peaceful and stable Afghanistan is vital for regional peace, security and stability in Central Asia, but that is not all. Afghanistan is also vital, as are the rest of the countries of Central Asia, to mutually advantageous development cooperation in this very important region.

In that context, we welcome today's adoption of a presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/2) that very much underscores that point, and we commend Kazakhstan for its facilitating role as penholder. Ethiopia attaches great importance to a regional approach to addressing threats to peace and security and promoting development cooperation to enhance the partnership between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, in line with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. In that regard, we recognize the important role that the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia continues to play in helping countries of the region to address their shared challenges to peace, stability and development. We note the declaration adopted at the meeting of Central Asian foreign ministers held on 11 December 2016 in Ashgabat on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Regional Centre, at which the countries of the region agreed to enhance regional cooperation with the support of the Centre. Of course, we will have another opportunity to discuss that and other developments with regard to the Regional Centre next week.

We believe that it is critically important to maximize the efficiency and efficacy of the work of the United Nations in Afghanistan and Central Asia, including through enhanced coordination across the United Nations system. We hope that the Centre will enhance its cooperation and coordination with relevant United Nations bodies such as the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and other regional organizations, in order to strengthen the capacity of the countries of the region to overcome their challenges and foster greater cooperation among themselves for the sake of shared peace, stability and development.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Kamilov (Uzbekistan): I would like to express our gratitude to the Republic of Kazakhstan for taking the initiative to hold these debates on Central Asia and Afghanistan at the Security Council. During his address to the General Assembly at its seventy-second session, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of the Republic of Uzbekistan stressed that

> "[t]he stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan is an important precondition to ensure not only regional security, but global security as well" (*A/72/PV.5, p. 15*).

Based on that, we believe firmly that Afghanistan must remain at the centre of the global agenda and that our shared determination to promote peace should not weaken. The choice in favour of a peace process remains the only solution to the ongoing confrontation

for all intra-Afghan forces. We believe that we are seeing the creation of conditions conducive to a fully fledged launch of the process for a peaceful settlement of the situation in Afghanistan. Despite differences that remain with regard to some aspects of the process, the international community is becoming increasingly aware that there can be no alternative to holding peace talks between the Government of Afghanistan and the armed opposition, including the Taliban, in support of the process of integrating Afghanistan into trade, economic and infrastructural relations with its neighbours.

Obviously, peace in Afghanistan will bring benefits to all countries of the vast Eurasian continent, promoting the construction of roads and railways, laying of pipelines and development of regional and transregional trade in all directions. But what must be done to make that happen? There must first be a regional and broad international consensus on the basic issues of establishing peace and security in Afghanistan. Secondly, there must be national reconciliation through direct dialogue between the central Government and the armed opposition.

To that end, the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan are jointly initiating an international ministerial conference on Afghanistan and the peace process, security cooperation and regional connectivity in Tashkent in late March. Together with our partners in Afghanistan, we have made a detailed preliminary study of the issue and have come to the conclusion that the Tashkent meeting will represent a logical continuation of the second meeting of the Kabul Process, scheduled for late February, in order to consolidate the results achieved within the framework of the common international efforts at various levels. Ultimately, holding a high-level forum in Tashkent should demonstrate that the Afghan problem will not go down in modern history as an example of the helplessness and indifference of the world community in countering the challenges and threats common to all mankind.

As everyone here knows, Uzbekistan has experience in promoting the peace process in Afghanistan. In 1999, at our initiative, Tashkent hosted the meeting of the 6 plus 2 Contact Group at the level of high representatives of the ministries of foreign affairs of Afghanistan's neighbours, as well as of Russia and the United States, with the participation of representatives of the warring parties, including the Taliban movement. The Tashkent Declaration on Fundamental Principles for a Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict in Afghanistan was adopted following the talks.

Today Uzbekistan is consistently making a real contribution to the development of regional cooperation, especially in terms of engaging Afghanistan in the system of trade, economic and infrastructural relations with the States of Central Asia We see the main goals of the multilateral meeting in Tashkent as agreeing on the basic principles for a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan, formulating a mechanism for launching direct negotiations between the Government of Afghanistan and the armed opposition, and coordinating international joint actions to support that process. The results that we hope the the conference will achieve are the following.

First, we aim to adopt a final document, a Tashkent declaration, that will define the basic principles and conditions for a peaceful settlement and specify the obligations of the Afghan Government and the armed opposition, as well as those of the international community, in terms of launching the negotiation process and its support. Secondly, we will formulate a regional and international consensus on the promotion of a political settlement in Afghanistan. Thirdly, we will consolidate the central and coordinating role of the Afghan side in the process of the political settlement in Afghanistan. Fourthly, we will appeal to the participants in the Tashkent conference, and to all the armed opposition groups in Afghanistan, to stop the violence and take part in the negotiation process with the Afghan Government. Fifthly, the forum's participants will reaffirm their international obligations for combating international terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

To ensure the efficiency and productivity of the Tashkent conference, and taking into account the views of our Afghan partners, we would like to invite the Secretary-General, his Special Representative for Afghanistan, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the foreign ministers of China, Russia, the United States, India, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as the countries of Central Asia, to take part in the work of the conference. Uzbekistan would be grateful for the support of the members of the Security Council for this joint initiative with Afghanistan. We are confident that its implementation will demonstrate the determination of

the world community to ensure peace and sustainable development in that country.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan.

Mr. Abdyldayev (Kyrgyzstan) (*spoke in Russian*): I would first like to sincerely congratulate our brother country of Kazakhstan on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month, and to express my confidence that the Republic of Kazakhstan will make a worthy contribution to resolving the difficult challenges we are facing.

The role and importance of the United Nations in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan and strengthening regional and international cooperation are invaluable. The subject of our meeting, which clearly encompasses the priority areas of our cooperation, our common challenges and the goals that we are working towards, is clear proof of that. We are all aware that if we are to achieve peace in Afghanistan, the desires of the Afghan people and their Government of National Unity are clearly not enough. We must, above all, reach a consensus among the permanent members of the Security Council.

Time has shown that the only way to ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan is by resolving its complex situation by exclusively political means, holding peace talks and achieving national reconciliation. However, we have to admit that there has been little tangible progress in that regard and certainly not as much as we expected. The bloodshed among the warring parties continues, as does their insistence on tactics demanding preconditions, making the start of peace talks almost impossible. Unfortunately, such a stalemate is liable to continue indefinitely, resulting in the further suffering and deaths of Afghan civilians, including women and children. In our view, therefore, the international community must come up with a realistic approach to the problem. In that regard, we support Uzbekistan's proposal to hold in an international conference in Tashkent in March on a peaceful settlement of the situation in Afghanistan, as Foreign Minister Kamilov of Uzbekistan just outlined. I am convinced that within the framework of that conference it will be possible to discuss new mechanisms for a peaceful settlement of the situation in Afghanistan in detail.

We share the view that the security and development of Afghanistan and the whole region are closely interrelated. Without security there can be no development and without development there can be no security. We believe that the countries of Central Asia are ready to engage actively in the process of building peace and stability in Afghanistan. We have comparative advantages and the potential for complementarity in our economies. However, there are problems related to inadequate transport infrastructure and limited access to external regions and markets. All of us, and all of the Central Asian countries above all, need to genuinely consolidate our cooperation and efforts on a basis of good-neighbourly relations in the interests of furthering the sustainable development of the countries of the region, including Afghanistan. We are also well aware that the development of major regional cooperation is chiefly a task for the Central Asian countries themselves.

I would like to note that since gaining independence, all the countries of Central Asia have made significant investments in improving railway and vehicle transport infrastructure. However, we also have to acknowledge that at present we have been taking an exclusively country-specific approach, and because of that, we are missing opportunities to effectively tackle our common problems by coordinating efforts at the regional level. We believe that with a regional approach, these projects would help to expand trade and have a positive impact on the social and economic situation in the region. In that regard, Kyrgyzstan has always supported the further consolidation of common efforts to develop coordinated approaches to resolving current issues of regional cooperation and development, assisting the peaceful development of Afghanistan and promoting economic integration at the regional and interregional level.

We commend the efforts made within the framework of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul process and the decisions taken following the seventh Ministerial Conference of Foreign Ministers, on the theme "Security and Economic Connectivity towards a Strengthened Heart of Asia Region", held in Baku at the end of 2017. Kyrgyzstan supports such initiatives aimed at establishing peace and achieving national reconciliation in Afghanistan, including strengthening confidence-building measures among the countries of the region, the joint implementation of various projects in Afghanistan, support for alternative ways of developing Afghanistan, and others.

There can be no question that the production and export of Afghan opium are two of the main issues plaguing Afghanistan and countries in the region.

As we see it, all possible support should be given to the initiative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime promoting Afghanistan's alternative development among regional and international partners. In that context, my country fully supports the outcomes and decisions of the international conference held in Ashgabat on 16 and 17 November of last year. Along with measures to counter the illegal production and trafficking of drugs and combat terrorism and radicalism, it is extremely important to pursue joint efforts to integrate Afghanistan's economy with those of other countries in the region, including the States of Central Asia, by expanding cooperation and improving regional infrastructure, trade, investment, transit and transport projects. The seventh ministerial-level Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan was held in Ashgabat on 15 November 2017, with the theme of deepening connectivity and expanding trade through investment in infrastructure and improved mutual cooperation. Some very important regional projects were adopted as a result of the forum, but they can be successfully implemented only if the international community provides the necessary financial support.

Kyrgyzstan views the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan as an important economic partner in the region first and foremost, and we are making every effort to implement the Central Asia-South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade project as soon as possible. We firmly believe that its successful implementation will bring peace as well as light and energy to Afghanistan.

I would like to take this opportunity to briefly touch on Kyrgyzstan's initiatives related to Afghanistan. In the area of transport infrastructure, we have supported connecting the road and rail networks of the countries of the region with those of Afghanistan. On that front, we are participating in the implementation of a five-nation project for the construction of a China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway, and we are supporting the construction of a railway within the framework of the Economic Cooperation Organization along the Iran-Afghanistan-Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan-China route. We are building an alternative North-South road in Kyrgyzstan that will shorten the route connecting the highways of our northern areas with Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the field of subregional economic integration, Kyrgyzstan is promoting an initiative to establish a tripartite Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan agricultural-industrial consortium.

Where establishing peace and stability in Afghanistan is concerned, we believe that education will play a major role in restoring peace in the country. We are ready to consider educating Afghan students in our country's educational institutions with the financial support of foreign donors, and we have the potential, and the scientific and educational foundations, to make that happen. For example, more than 300 Afghan students are currently studying at various universities in Kyrgyzstan.

In conclusion, I would like to note that we support the commitment of all Central Asian countries to joint long-term cooperation with Afghanistan, and together with our international partners, we stand ready to cooperate fully to meet the challenges we are facing. Kyrgyzstan acknowledges the importance of coordinated action and a regional approach on the part of the international community in creating a zone of peace, cooperation and prosperity in Central Asia and Afghanistan. In that regard, we welcome the Secretary-General's initiative to use the tool of preventive diplomacy more effectively. We firmly believe that only through joint efforts can we make progress in solving Afghanistan's political and economic problems and ensuring security both in that country and all over the world.

Lastly, I wish our brother Afghan people peace and prosperity.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan.

Mr. Aslov (Tajikistan): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Kazakhstan on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the first time, and to thank the delegation for convening today's ministerial-level debate on the very important topic of building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development. I would also like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his very constructive briefing.

Central Asia and Afghanistan — once a foothold of global political and economic development, a hub of science, philosophy and intellectual life and a region that bridged civilizations from Asia to Europe via the Silk Road — have undergone significant changes throughout their long history.

Today, the worsening situation in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the threats coming from

its territory are of particular concern. The military-political situation in the bordering northern provinces of the country has a steady tendency towards complication. The expansion of international terrorism, the increase in extremism, transnational organized crime and drug trafficking and the exacerbation of environmental issues such as climate change and desertification are among the most pressing challenges faced by the region today. That current situation requires that the countries of the region take more robust action and make firm commitments by facilitating regional cooperation and partnerships based on a fair, effective and mutually beneficial economic system.

Tajikistan, which shares a long border with Afghanistan, bears the brunt of the security challenges and cannot remain indifferent to the current situation on that border. The activation of radical terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, the Taliban, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Ansarullah Movement and others in the northern districts of the country against the backdrop of the significant influx of narcotics, weapons and human resources is a matter of great concern to us.

Another threat that has a significant impact on the adoption of measures to ensure stability and security in Tajikistan, Central Asia and beyond, and which requires the joint effort of the international community, is illicit drug trafficking. Combating drug trafficking and drug abuse is part of the fight against organized crime, international terrorism and extremism, and the fight is carried out through implementation of foreign policy and through economic, legal, organizational, technical, operational, preventive and other measures. Coordinated activities of the Central Asian States in this sphere of common interests are carried out by their special drug-control coordinating agencies.

The Republic of Tajikistan, like any other State in the region around Afghanistan, bears the brunt of the fight against drug trafficking. Thanks to the measures taken by the Government of Tajikistan, as well as the support of donor countries and international organizations, including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, our country has made visible progress in that direction. I must note that the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan adopted a national strategy on combating illicit drug trafficking for 2013-2020 and a sectoral programme for the implementation of that strategy with a view to combating illicit trafficking in narcotics.

It is obvious that the fight against drug trafficking requires the joint efforts of countries at the regional and international levels, because no country alone can deal with this threat and its related crimes. Unfortunately, nowadays, despite the growing threat of drug trafficking, as evidenced by the record expansion of the opium poppy cultivation area in Afghanistan in 2017, not enough attention is paid to combating it. I consider it necessary to emphasize that all countries of the region should give priority to developing cooperation in combating illicit drug trafficking and developing concerted actions aimed at counteracting this evil.

The complex military and political situation in Afghanistan requires us not only to mobilize domestic resources, but also to improve the military and security infrastructure at the border and to provide the border guards with modern technologies and equipment so as to ensure efficient border management and prevent undesirable incidents at the border. At present, the law enforcement agencies of Tajikistan and Afghanistan are closely collaborating on those issues.

Tajikistan, as an advocate of the restoration of peace and security in Afghanistan through economic and social development, believes that regional cooperation is an important element for strengthening stability in that war-torn country and in the entire region. The joint promotion of projects in the fields of transport, communications, energy, investment, education, human resources, border management and other areas could become a basis for the rehabilitation and sustainable development of Afghanistan.

Being at the crossroads of Eurasia, Afghanistan could gain access to some of the fastest-growing markets in the world and serve as a transit hub for the expansion of trade between Europe, Asia and the Middle East. In that regard, I would like to highlight the importance of the timely implementation of regional transport, communications and energy projects, including the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade project — CASA-1000. To facilitate trade with Afghanistan, Tajikistan, with the assistance of the international community, has built five bridges on the Panj River and established two free economic zones on the border with Afghanistan, which significantly increased the volume of trade between the two countries.

One of the factors contributing to the maintenance of peace and stability in Afghanistan is the development of

the education system. Currently, more than 500 students study in Tajikistan universities. The Government of Tajikistan has decided to provide scholarships to approximately 1,000citizens of Afghanistan until 2025.

Tajikistan will continue its efforts to further strengthen cooperation with the Government of Afghanistan and international partners in the social, economic and security spheres with a view to supporting peace, stability and socioeconomic development in that neighbouring country. At the same time, we believe that an increase in targeted assistance by the international community, with the United Nations playing a central and coordinating role, remains vitally important. We are confident that the Central Asian countries need to further intensify economic cooperation with Afghanistan. Afghanistan's active involvement in regional projects is crucial.

Tajikistan's policy in the region is based on developing and strengthening good-neighbourly relations and expanding traditional practices of fraternal coexistence with all neighbouring countries. We have made them a priority in our international relations.

We believe that supporting Afghanistan's economic revival and social development is the best tool for maintaining its peace and stability and for ensuring security in the region. Therefore, we would like to call on the international community to increase its assistance in supporting socioeconomic development and improving the security situation in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, we note in particular the role of the regional organizations in ensuring peace and security in Afghanistan. Therefore, we call for strengthening cooperation between the relevant United Nations institutions and regional organizations, including the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Tajikistan stands ready for an open and constructive dialogue with all interested parties aimed at finding solutions to current security and stability challenges faced by Afghanistan and the region and at facilitating regional economic development.

Once again, Mr. President, please accept my sincere congratulations on your assumption of the Council presidency. I wish you and your team every success in fulfilling your noble commitments.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Karzai (Afghanistan): It is a great privilege to address the Security Council. I would like to begin by thanking you, Sir, and the Government of Kazakhstan for bringing us together for this important meeting on Afghanistan and Central Asia. We consider today's meeting an important initiative on an issue of strategic relevance for peace and stability in Afghanistan and our broader region. We also thank Secretary-General Guterres for his insightful briefing.

I am pleased to recognize the presence of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of our Central Asian neighbouring States and other partner countries. The high-level representation at this meeting signifies a personal commitment to the imperative of securing lasting peace and stability in my country, for which we are deeply grateful.

Today's meeting comes just days after the Security Council's visit to Afghanistan. The visit was an opportunity to discuss, broadly, a number of important issues, ranging from security, development and regional cooperation, to governance, human rights and democratization. We are confident that the outcome of the visit will contribute positively to strengthening the international community's engagement, cooperation and consensus on Afghanistan.

One issue highlighted in the visit concerns the topic on which we are meeting today: that Afghanistan's stability and development should not be seen in isolation from security and stability in the countries on our periphery and beyond. In that regard, the imperative of deepened cooperation between Afghanistan and Central Asian States on common challenges and promoting our shared prosperity has gained new impetus.

Afghanistan has always recognized the importance of our relations with all regional countries, especially those of Central Asia. Those bonds have endured on the basis of mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity, shared interests and common affinities of culture and history.

Despite those positive attributes, over recent years we have missed opportunities to expand the scope of our cooperation for common security, development and prosperity. Nevertheless, the past year has seen new dynamism take shape in our cooperation with Central Asian countries. That is based on the firm commitment of the Government of Afghanistan to increasing collaboration across multiple fields and sectors, such as regional connectivity, energy, trade and transit,

security cooperation, agriculture and in the cultural and educational spheres.

That new dynamic is manifested in a series of high-level visits to the Central Asian region in 2017 by the leadership of the Afghan Government. Last July, President Ghani visited Ashgabat and met with Turkmen President Gubanguly Berdimuhamedow. In August, Chief Executive Abdullah visited Astana and met with the Kazakh Prime Minister. And just last month, President Ghani paid a visit to Tashkent, where he held wide-ranging discussions with his Uzbek counterpart, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, and signed more than 20 different memorandums of understanding.

Those visits have helped set in motion a new era of engagement, interaction and cooperation on a common agenda for our security, economic development and integration, as well as strengthening people-to-people ties.

We all know that prosperity is not possible in the absence of security — a fundamental requirement in any society. Terrorism and violent extremism lie at the forefront of the interlinked challenges threatening the security and stability of Afghanistan and the region.

Our fight against terrorism is being conducted on behalf of the region and the world at large. We are making enormous sacrifices in that struggle in terms of human lives, ordinary civilians and our security forces alike. Despite all the challenges, our forces have made progress in pressing violent militants and terrorists, including the Taliban, the Haqanni Network, Al-Qaida, Da'esh and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, among others. In the past 10 months alone, our security forces have carried out more than 2,000 security operations nationwide, which have resulted in major losses among violent militants, including foreign terrorist fighters from the region and beyond who come to fight in Afghanistan.

We are pleased to note that the imperative of addressing the problem of regional terrorist sanctuaries and safe-havens is now recognized more than ever before. That issue was loudly communicated by a broad spectrum of Afghan society during the Council's visit to Afghanistan last week.

Experience has shown that terrorism impacts all of us, and the task of eliminating it lies beyond the capacity of any single country. It requires a comprehensive effort. In the context of our joint endeavours, we must prevent the radicalization of our youth, and identify and prevent the problem of cross-border terrorism and criminal and other illegal activities.

We must also work together to overcome the problem of illicit drugs. Progress in addressing that threat will be possible only through joint and collaborative efforts, focused on all aspects of the challenge, including production, demand, trafficking of chemical precursors and consumption.

We have engaged in comprehensive efforts to improve security and defeat terrorism. Beyond the scope of military efforts, we are working to ensure success in our peace efforts with elements of the armed opposition. On 28 February, we will convene the second meeting of the Kabul Process, where we will present to the international community our way forward for peace and combating terrorism. We count on the full support and endorsement of all Process partners, including from Central Asian States.

The Kabul Process gathering will precede the Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan in late March, which we will co-host with the Government of Uzbekistan. In that regard, we wish to highlight that all such initiatives should serve to reinforce Afghan-led and -owned peace efforts, under the Kabul Process, which remains the overarching framework.

On the margins of the Tashkent Conference, we also plan to hold the first meeting of the C5+Afghanistan. The C5+1 cooperation framework for Afghanistan and Central Asia is an important new regional initiative that will maintain sustained dialogue across a broad spectrum of areas. The United Nations will undoubtedly have a role to play in the Process.

Today's meeting also serves to underscore that the dangerous nexus facing Afghanistan and the region can and must be addressed only if existing efforts are integrated and the peace, security and development pillars are woven together. That imperative lies at the core of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, an Afghan-led initiative, which most Central Asian countries are part of. That will remain a key focus as we work to increase our cooperation with Central Asian countries through various platforms, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, in which we hope to gain full membership soon.

We also see additional potential for cooperation with the United Nations Regional Centre on Preventive

Diplomacy (UNRCCA) in multiple areas. In that context, we welcome the outcome of the imnisterial meeting on security and development convened in November by the Government of Uzbekistan, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the UNRCCA. Efforts under those formats will help us overcome issues of common concern. In that connection, we are of the view that any regional approach should harmonize and help to consolidate existing international efforts for security and stability in Afghanistan.

Another central theme in our discussion today concerns the crucial way in which the development agenda helps propel security. That is a key principle guiding international efforts to stabilize conflict situations worldwide. Afghanistan is clearly no exception.

Over the past three years, the Afghan Government has worked tirelessly to advance economic cooperation towards a new horizon. We have done so through the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference, which has seen unprecedented progress since its inception in 2005.

The past year has seen many notable achievements, but none as striking as the gains made in the area of regional economic cooperation. What we envisioned a few years ago is now truly taking shape and becoming a reality. Projects such as the Lapus Lazuli Corridor and Five Nations Railway, connecting China, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iran, will have a profound impact on increasing connectivity and boosting the movement of goods, ideas and people.

We also made headway in 2017 in the implementation of other mega-projects, such as the electricity and natural gas initiatives — the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission Trade Project and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project. Moreover, the Chabahar Port is now operational, thus increasing the flow and trade of goods. Over the course of the year, we will work to make further progress on those initiatives, the benefits of which are far-reaching and not only help boost trade and transit but also facilitate the exchange of new and innovative ideas for our common prosperity, in line with the related Sustainable Development Goals.

In conclusion, our gathering here today draws our attention to the unique opportunity that lies before us — an opportunity to shift the dynamic and transform the nexus of regional, threats such as instability, terrorism and other criminal activities, into a nexus of peace, security, economic growth and development for our prosperity. In that regard, we believe a new start towards regional engagement and convergence has begun. It is up to us to do our share and transform that new vision into reality. Afghanistan stands confident that our endeavour will succeed.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkmenistan.

Mrs. Ataeva (Turkmenistan) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan as he presides over the Security Council today and to express my certainty that under his able leadership the work of the Council will be crowned with success. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and for his involvement in the development of the Central Asian region.

The discussions initiated by Kazakhstan today are focused on issues related to sustainable peace, security and development in the Central Asian region and its closest neighbours, first and foremost Afghanistan. Turkmenistan takes an active part in joint international efforts to strengthen peace, security and cooperation in Central Asia. We have gained solid peacekeeping experience, which is also needed to properly address such crucial issues as assisting regional disarmament processes, resolving water and energy resource problems in a balanced manner, ensuring environmental well-being and countering the threatening dangers and challenges of the day.

We note the role of preventive diplomacy in preventing conflicts, dealing with their root causes, promoting an atmosphere of trust among countries and creating conditions conducive to effective interaction among States in the political, diplomatic, economic, social, environmental and other spheres. Turkmenistan attaches particular importance to the activities of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, which was established by a decision of the Security Council upon the initiative of the five Central Asian States. Over the 10 years of its existence, the Centre has provided the Governments of the countries of Central Asia a platform for dialogue on the most important regional issues, including the management of shared resources, combating such transnational threats as terrorism, violent extremism, organized crime, drug trafficking and human

trafficking and making joint efforts to help stabilize the situation in Afghanistan. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General and members of the Security Council and all of those who have spoken in favour of the comprehensive efforts of the Centre, which we expect will continue in future.

We fully agree that there is an inextricable link between security and development. Turkmenistan has therefore undertaken large-scale projects that meet the shared goals of bringing welfare and sustainable development to the people of the region. An important aspect of this constructive strategy is the strengthening of our traditional relations of friendship, good-neighbourliness and cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. We have been unwavering in our support of an exclusively peaceful, political and diplomatic resolution to the situation in that neighbouring country. Indeed, Turkmenistan is effectively supporting the socioeconomic and cultural regeneration of Afghanistan.

We have made constructive proposals aimed at developing fundamentally new mechanisms to stabilize the situation in the country and are taking consistent steps to rebuild its economy. Accordingly, Turkmenistan initiated the large-scale infrastructure projects mentioned here today, with Afghanistan's involvement. In the end, however, the problems of Afghanistan go far beyond the region and affect the prospects for sustainable development for the entire international community. Therefore, Turkmenistan has always adhered to its principled position on the need to develop a non-military, political and diplomatic approach to resolving the situation in that neighbouring State.

As an active participant in the efforts of the international community in this area, our country is convinced that peace and security are a crucial part of the prosperity of the region and its peoples, including Afghanistan. In that context, we view Turkmen-Afghan cooperation as an integral part of a broad international partnership. Turkmenistan's perspective is based on the desire to quickly involve our southern neighbour in regional integration, as well as seeing it join various projects, which, in turn, will make it possible for active peacebuilding to occur in Afghanistan.

The seventh Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, which took place in Ashgabat on 14 and 15 November 2017, is the logical next step for Turkmenistan in this area. It is also yet another step forward towards strengthening and broadening regional economic partnership. We support all regional and other initiatives, including Uzbekistan's initiative aimed at settling the situation in Afghanistan.

We call on Afghanistan and regional partners to maintain momentum in their efforts to strengthen regional dialogue and cooperation. We will continue to further support activities of cooperation and coordination of efforts between the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in order to strengthen their capacity to maintain peace and sustainable development in the region.

In conclusion, I would like to say to our brotherly country Kazakhstan that we wish it success in presiding over the Security Council this month.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Kazakhstan presidency for its timely initiative to convene today's debate. I believe the significantly high level of participation clearly demonstrates the importance that the international community attaches to these meetings. We fully share the views set forth in the presidency's concept note for today's debate (S/2018/7, annex) that building regional partnership and cooperation, not only in Afghanistan and Central Asia but in all regions of the world, serves as the most appropriate model to reinforce the inextricable nexus between security and development.

More than a decade after being invaded, Afghanistan, the region and the world are not any safer than they were before the invasion. That is a fact. But it has also been the case for all of the invasions that have occurred in our region. Afghanistan should become an exemplar for regional and international cooperation, rather than for competition. The world should regard the situation in Afghanistan as an opportunity to establish peace, security and stability through development and to find a win-win approach — not just for Afghanistan but for its neighbours, including the States of Central Asia and for the international community in general.

Investing in long-term cooperation with Afghanistan, enhancing economic interaction and

connectivity and expanding regional infrastructure, trade and investment and transit and transportation projects cannot only bring about security and political and economic benefits for Afghanistan, but also for all its partners in the region and the world. That partnership also helps reduce the breeding ground for terrorist and extremist groups.

Security and development are interrelated and mutually reinforcing factors that transcend the national boundaries of a single State in today's world, and often require a comprehensive and all-inclusive regional approach. Iran is indeed very eager to see a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan as its neighbour. Security and development in Afghanistan directly and indirectly affect security at our borders and in the region.

Our support for the Afghan National Unity Government is unrelenting. We welcome any achievement along the path leading towards an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process resulting in lasting and comprehensive peace in Afghanistan. It is in that context that Iran welcomed, and continues to participate in, the Kabul Process and any other similar processes to help foster peace and security in Afghanistan. Strengthening our regional cooperation with Afghanistan is a priority and a major pathway to consolidating peace, stability and economic development in our neighbouring country. In that regard, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has spared no effort to promote its brotherly relations with the Afghan people. Over a decade's time, Iran has funded altogether more than 300 development projects, including reconstruction and building infrastructure for a total of $500 million, including major projects such as the Chabahar port facilities, established through a trilateral agreement made by Iran, India and Afghanistan, and the Khaf-Herat railway.

We have also funded and implemented many projects in the area of technology transfers, know-how and training with Afghan work forces in various area to help them reconstruct their own country. Those projects have the capacity to change regional economic perspectives and can help foster prosperity and stability in Afghanistan.

In addition to those projects, for more than three decades Iran has hosted millions of Afghan refugees. We continue to share our much-needed subsidized goods and services, including basic commodities, public health and public education. This year alone, our schools are providing education to nearly 400,000 undocumented Afghan students.

The challenges facing Afghanistan are complex and interconnected. The nexus linking security and development is deep-rooted; it cannot be addressed solely through military build-up and strategies. For example, the 87 per cent increase in opium production is not only a clear indication of underdevelopment, low-income and lack of economic opportunities, it is also alarming when we note the fact that narcotics provide a major source of income for terrorist groups. Furthermore, poverty provides immense and abundant opportunities for recruitment by terrorist groups and drug trafficking networks. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan is playing a crucial role at this critical moment for Afghanistan. It definitely needs more support from the international community.

Let me conclude by expressing my best wishes to the fraternal people and the Government of Afghanistan and to reassure them of Iran's full support in their endeavour to bring about peace and prosperity in their country.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I thank Kazakhstan for organizing this important and timely debate.

Belgium aligns itself with the statement to be made on behalf of the European Union. In my national capacity, and as a member of the Group of Friends of Afghanistan, I shall focus today on three areas, namely, economic development, counter-terrorism and cooperation between the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA).

First, concerning economic development, as we all know, among other things, lasting peace depends upon a country's economic development, which itself is closely linked to the level and efforts made in the area of regional cooperation. Afghanistan and Central Asia are situated at a historical crossroads linking the East and the West. It is our belief that Afghanistan and Central Asia have everything to gain from deeper economic cooperation, better market integration and increased interconnectivity. That integration should be open to a broader area, extending from South and East

Asia to the Middle East and all the way to Europe so that Central Asia can once again serve as such a crossroads.

Secondly, concerning counter-terrorism, regional cooperation is also necessary for combating smuggling, transnational crime and the recruitment by, and the financing of, terrorist organization networks. That is especially important given that the military advances against Da'esh in Iraq and Syria are now forcing us to focus upon the return of foreign terrorist fighters from those areas. We share that serious concern with Central Asia and with Afghanistan, and we advocate for a strong and active role played by the United Nations in providing cooperation and support in that area. In addition to its financial support, Belgium is also ready to contribute to that work by sharing our experience and best practices. Furthermore, United Nations agencies must continue to support Central Asia through the joint plan of action for the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. We believe that adequate attention must be paid to preventing violent extremism, especially among young people, as that accounts for one of the root causes of terrorism. The Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and UNRCCA must continue to play an important role in that area.

Thirdly, concerning the United Nations contribution, that brings me to the matter of cooperation between UNAMA and UNRCCA. Providing cooperation and better coordination on the ground is particularly urgent in the context of combating drug trafficking and trafficking in human beings. As evidenced by the substantial number of participants from the region in today's debate, I welcome the commitment of Central Asian countries to stabilizing and developing Afghanistan.

In conclusion, I would be remiss were I not to mention the recent visit by the Security Council to Afghanistan. I commend that visit, which sends a message of support from the international community to the Afghan Government. Belgium congratulates the Government for its commitment and renewed energy conducive to peace talks — something that Council members have been able to see for themselves. Peace talks must lead to a lasting solution to the conflict, but can succeed only if they are supported by all the parties in the region and by the international community as a whole. The success of those talks would give strong impetus to lasting stabilization in the country, and, beyond that, to the economic development of Afghanistan, its immediate neighbours and the countries of Central Asia.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): First of all, let me convey the condolences of the Government and the people of Germany for the tragic bus accident involving many victims from Uzbekistan.

I thank you, Sir, for convening today's debate and for allowing Germany to speak. I would like to commend the Kazakh presidency for including this topic on the agenda of the Security Council. I recall that this is Kazakhstan's third initiative in this regard: an Arria Formula meeting, which Afghanistan and Germany co-hosted, was held last November; a trip to Kabul by the Council took place last week, whose outcome was very interesting; and today we hold a ministerial debate, in which a number of high-ranking Ministers are participating. I therefore again congratulate the Kazakh presidency for having put regional partnership with Afghanistan on the agenda.

I would like to underscore what the majority of speakers have stated — when we consider today's debate, a common thread emerges with regard to support for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and political process, which is very important. As my French colleague stated earlier, elections are the main priority in the political process. They must be Afghan-owned, take place as scheduled and be legitimate so that all Afghans can participate. The concept of an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process will not work without international support. In that regard, if I may, Mr. President, I would like to commend you on the regional cooperation that Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries have promoted. I believe that such cooperation is very encouraging. It is clear that it fully embraces Afghanistan as part of the C5+1. According to the Central Asian countries, they provide a great deal of support to Afghanistan. They assist many Afghan students by offering scholarships for various initiatives, such as for the Tashkent Conference, as I learned today for the first time. Support was provided, but it was Afghan-led.

Germany has always supported the regional approach in the European Union (EU), such as when we held the presidency in 2007. We launched an EU and Central Asia cooperation agreement, whose renewal we are now supporting and which we expect in 2019.

However, I do not want to pre-empt the statement of the observer of the European Union, with which Germany, as I said, fully aligns itself.

I would like to make one last point about international support and the United Nations. I listened intently to the statement made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan with regard to the important role played by the United Nations. I fully agree with the fact that there should be greater coordination among the various United Nations activities. That also reflects the proposals of the Secretary-General with regard to stronger United Nations cohesion abroad. I would also like to underscore the importance of the Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia, whose head is in attendance today. I agree with the remarks made by the representative of Ethiopia about the Regional Centre, which Germany fully supports.

When individual countries and regions state that they support Afghanistan, it is very important that they adopt a coherent approach that is based on the understanding of the links among the humanitarian, peace and development dimensions. I found it very encouraging that almost everyone at today's meeting stated that without security there can be no development. That notion was explained best by our Swedish colleague when he highlighted the important link between development and security. I agree with his statement. I thought that his remarks were encouraging, and I believe everyone supports them. The Russian Foreign Minister also mentioned the importance of sustained economic and social development in Afghanistan.

The Secretary-General highlighted the scope of such development. I would like to express my support for water cooperation in the region, while taking into consideration climate change and temperature rise. Water, energy and infrastructure — with its various initiatives — are all key. Economic development and trade are key to eliminating and providing an alternative to opium production, which leads to devastating consequences.

Germany has supported Afghanistan for many years. Our civilian support in recent years, including the past year, totalled more than €400 million. Afghanistan is one of our main economic partners and will remain so. However, it is also true that without security it is likely that there will be no development. From the start, Germany has supported NATO as the second largest troop-contributing country. We are focusing on the north of Afghanistan. We try to stabilize it and help our Afghan friends by providing training, advice and assistance to the Afghan security forces. We also chair the International Contact Group on Afghanistan and strive to enhance international cohesion with regard to peace and stability in the region.

At the same time, we know that there is no military solution to the Afghan crisis. Therefore, we fully support the intra-Afghan peace process, which must be Afghan-led. We support the meeting in Kabul on 28 February. However, with regard to an agreement — and we all hope for a political agreement to be reached — I agree with the remarks made by both the Deputy Secretary of State of the United States and the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, who stated that the agreement must not be at the expense of progress made thus far.

We heard very impressive statistics with regard to the number of girls attending school and the role of women. I think that it is very encouraging that our colleagues brought along some Afghan women to prove that progress has been made. It must be maintained.

Following today's meeting, I am totally convinced that Kazakhstan will ensure that the issue of regional partnership in Afghanistan will remain on the Council's agenda. Germany will always support it.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing today's debate on Afghanistan and for choosing the subject "Building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development". We also thank the Secretary-General for sharing his views on a subject that is so closely linked to the stability of our region.

Afghanistan is the true heart of Asia and a linchpin to the economy of the region. As pointed out by several other speakers, security and development are closely linked, and that link must drive the policies and actions of all stakeholders at the conceptual and operational levels. However, in the case of Afghanistan, that link is skewed in one direction only — the impact of the deteriorating security environment on development.

That the security situation weighs adversely on Afghanistan is reflected in the latest World Bank *Development Update*. From 2003 to 2012, Afghanistan recorded a 9.6 per cent annual economic growth rate.

Last year, the rate was 2.6 per cent, which is better than the 2.2 per cent recorded in 2016, which in turn was better than the lower growth rate in 2014-2015. Next year, the projections are for growth to edge up to 3.2 per cent, assuming the security situation holds.

Many of us who are engaged in development and infrastructure projects in Afghanistan are acutely aware of the disproportionate amount of resources that are diverted to protecting the projects and infrastructure that is created, rather than implementing more projects in the country. While we commonly see attacks on dams, schools, parliament buildings and electric-power centres, what is most debilitating for the development of the country are the attacks on its people. The attacks on the young in Afghan schools, women in Afghan hospitals and the hopeful in Afghan mosques all are a stark reminder of how the very spirit of Afghanistan's future is being systematically threatened and scarred by those who believe that violence is the only way to achieve their goals.

The people of Central and South Asia have been connected through centuries. We have shared commonalities of art and culture, ideas and knowledge, as well as language and traditions. These connections, while now tarnished by decades of war and instability in the region, remain resilient even in the face of the forces of decay and division. Today, they are in need of rejuvenation and reconnection. To reconnect and revive the commonalities of the region, we need to confront these forces of decay and destruction.

It is our belief that the starting point of our journey to realize the full spectrum of connectivity between Central and South Asia, as articulated by our Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi — from culture to commerce; from traditions to technology; from investments to information technology; from services to strategy; and from people to politics — begins in Afghanistan.

In line with our vision of a connected region, we established in 2017 air corridors between India and Afghanistan to overfly the obstacles imposed by geography and mindsets that hurt the welfare of the Afghan people. We have also cooperated with Iran and Afghanistan to facilitate the flow of goods between our countries through the Chabahar port. This also opens opportunities for surface connectivity between India and the Central Asian region.

Recent visits to India by President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah in the past three months have provided impetus to the wide-ranging new development partnership that both our countries launched in September 2017. This covers diverse areas, including education, health, agriculture, infrastructure, renewable energy, drinking-water supply and human-resource development. Our people-to-people contacts extend from colleges and cricket fields to trade and investment.

For thousands of years, Afghanistan was situated at the heart of Asia. The cities of Kabul, Balkh, Herat, Kandahar and Bamiyan constituted some of the key way stations on the crossroads of history through which trade, culture, religions, syncretic philosophies and technologies freely flowed, to reach every corner of Eurasia. We therefore support the desire of the Afghan Government and people, as expressed by President Ghani, to regain their country's former status as the centre of the Asian crossroads. Afghanistan has always been at the heart of networks: a roundabout, a place of meetings, civilizations, religions, cultures and, of course, armies and traders as well as pilgrims, and, hopefully, will once again become the true heart of our region's prosperity.

It is our vision that Afghanistan will regain its place, and we remain committed to working closely with our regional and international partners to bring peace, security, stability and prosperity to Afghanistan. It is with this in mind that our Prime Minister, during his visit to Afghanistan on 24 December 2015, to inaugurate the Parliament building, stopped over in Lahore, Pakistan. Unfortunately, the visit was followed by a heinous and barbaric terrorist attack on the Pathankot airbase on 1 January 2016, perpetrated and planned by the very same mindsets that attack the spirit of Afghanistan every day. These mindsets differentiate between good and bad terrorists and refuse to see reason in peace. People with these mindsets are reluctant to join hands in moving the region forward to build a shared future for our people and our youth. These mindsets need to change.

We honour the supreme sacrifices made by the Afghan Defence and Security Forces for the cause of humanity and in their efforts at fighting terrorism emanating from beyond Afghanistan's borders. Terrorism and externally induced instability pose the gravest threat to Afghanistan's peace, stability and

prosperity, and the growing arc of terrorist violence endangers our entire region.

There is a common Afghan saying that roughly translates as, "If water is muddied downstream, do not waste your time filtering it; better to go upstream and clean it".

As such, support for voices of peace in Afghanistan alone is not enough. We must focus on addressing the challenges posed by cross-border terrorism emanating from safe havens and sanctuaries to our region, especially to Afghanistan. If we do so, the decay that has been inflicted on Afghanistan can be made reversible.

The Council has returned after a successful visit to Afghanistan. It was a visit during which, in the many interactions they had with a cross-section of Afghan interlocutors, Council members must certainly have come across the common Afghan saying, "A sign is enough for the wise to understand".

We hope that the Council will act with wisdom to promote the vision of a shared and connected future for the people of the region by addressing the security conundrum that Afghanistan faces.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): At the outset, allow me to thank Kazakhstan for having organized this important debate. We appreciate the close attention paid to the situation in Afghanistan during Kazakhstan's presidency of the Security Council.

The Council's recent mission to Kabul was a solid manifestation of its resolve in supporting the Government and the people of Afghanistan in their efforts to rebuild their country. We thank Kazakhstan for its leadership in taking this mission forward.

We believe that Afghanistan, located in the Heart of Asia, is inseparable from Central Asia. The security, stability and prosperity of Afghanistan is of key importance for that of Central Asia and other neighbouring regions. This is also essential for the maintenance of global peace and security.

Addressing the challenges that Afghanistan continues to face in the fight against terrorism, radicalism, violent extremism, illegal narcotics production and trafficking is also crucial for the countries of Central Asia and beyond. That is why regional actors as well as the wider international community have important responsibilities and roles in assisting Afghanistan to overcome these challenges.

It is not realistic to think of long-lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan without the support of neighbouring and regional countries. Therefore, the continued constructive engagement of the international community with regional actors could contribute to enabling an atmosphere conducive to genuine cooperation.

Security and development in Afghanistan are closely interlinked. There can be no development without security, and security cannot be sustained without development. There is a need to enhance regional ownership and cooperation in order to achieve progress on both fronts. We therefore welcome the recent efforts and initiatives to strengthen the interaction and cooperation between Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries. We see such initiatives as complimentary to the wider efforts to enhance Afghanistan's focused regional cooperation.

Our vision for Afghanistan is a peaceful, secure and stable country that enjoys good and cooperative relations with its neighbours, while being at the centre of major regional cooperation projects in infrastructure, trade and transportation. With that understanding, we believe that the recent signing, in Ashgabat, of the Lapis Lazuli Transit, Trade and Transport Route agreement will also solidify the basis of regional cooperation by bolstering trade.

Turkey will continue to contribute to the regional cooperation efforts, including through the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, which we are pleased to co-chair for the second time this year. Increasing cooperation in the Heart of Asia will not only benefit Afghanistan, it will also constitute a useful instrument for the region as a whole to realize its full potential in economic development, investments and trade.

We would also like to emphasize that an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process is central to achieving long-lasting peace in the country. Enhanced dialogue and cooperation among regional actors is necessary for the peace and reconciliation efforts to yield concrete results. Therefore, we look forward to the successful holding of the forthcoming second meeting of the Kabul Process. Turkey remains ready to contribute to the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation efforts to the best of its ability.

In conclusion, we would like to underline that the Afghan people deserve a better future. The continued commitment and support of countries of the region, including those in Central Asia, as well as the wider international community, will be critical in assisting the Afghan Government and people along that path. In that regard, we are pleased to see minister-level participation, including from Central Asian countries, in our meeting today. Turkey remains ready to assist all efforts in that regard as long as our help is needed.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): On behalf of the Pakistan delegation, I would like to congratulate Kazakhstan on assuming the presidency of the Security Council and for organizing this very important debate in a very timely way.

It is almost a truism to say there can be no development without peace and no peace without development. The situation in Afghanistan starkly illustrates how the absence of security prevents economic development and, in turn, how a lack of economic development fuels and breeds conflict and insecurity. Despite the large presence of foreign military forces and the huge outlays of extended assistance, security has deteriorated and economic growth has been anaemic in Afghanistan. Yet there is great promise in Afghanistan. It is a strategically located country, which can act as a bridge between its multiple neighbours, between South and Central Asia and between West and East Asia.

Muhammad Iqbal, the poet who first conceived of Pakistan as an independent State, also described Afghanistan as the heart of Asia. Presciently, the poet of the East declared, over a century ago, that if there is instability in Afghanistan, Asia will be unstable; while peace in Afghanistan will bring peace and prosperity to all of Asia. The people of Afghanistan have paid a heavy price for over four decades of foreign invasions and bloody civil wars. And so have the people of Pakistan — Afghanistan's closest neighbour. Indeed, the entire region has been buffeted by the war, turmoil, terrorism, drugs and instability radiating from Afghanistan.

We in Pakistan recognize the imposing challenges that face Afghanistan in realizing economic and social development. We commend the security and economic reforms envisaged by the Afghan Government. Strengthening bilateral relations is a priority for my Government. We have taken a number of initiatives to support Afghanistan's economic development. We have done all we can to improve the transit of Afghan trade through our ports. We look forward to the day when transit trade from Central Asia can flow through Afghanistan and Pakistan, which is the shortest route to the Arabian Sea. Fifty thousand Afghan students have studied in my country's universities, and we also offer 3,000 scholarships to our Afghan brothers and sisters. Pakistan is also committed to several projects — the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project and the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project — which will contribute to the economic integration of the entire region. Pakistan has committed $1 billion over the past decade to various infrastructure, road network and development projects in Afghanistan.

However, none of our efforts to support Afghanistan's economic development can be successful without the restoration of peace. Sadly, civil war continues in Afghanistan. Over 40 per cent of the country is under insurgent control, contested or ungoverned. Illicit drug trafficking provides insurgent groups with a steady financial income estimated at almost $400 million a year. Indeed, with its safe havens inside the country and income from the narcotics trade, the insurgency does not really need any outside assistance or support centres to sustain itself.

Afghanistan and its partners, especially the United States, therefore need to address those challenges inside Afghanistan, rather than shift the onus of ending the conflict onto others. Those who imagine sanctuaries outside really need a reality check. And those who speak of changing mindsets need to look within at their own record of subversion against my country, as our capture of an Indian spy has amply demonstrated and proved beyond any shadow of doubt.

The international community has found time and again that sustainable peace is achievable only through a negotiated end to war. The presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/2) the Council adopted this morning again reiterates that firm consensus of the global community. After 17 years of war, it is more than evident that neither the Afghan Government and its military partners nor the Afghan Taliban are in a position to impose a military solution on each other.

The continuing resort to military force and escalation of the conflict without an accompanying

political and diplomatic strategy will not yield a result different from what we have seen in the past decade and a half. It will produce more violence and suffering for the Afghan people. It will not yield a political solution. And it is not enough to pay lip service to a negotiated settlement and then do little other than exercise and execute a strategy of force and coercion under the delusion that it might work.

We also call on the Taliban to abandon the path of violence and to join the talks. Both sides need to show the determination and the commitment to follow a path of a negotiated settlement.

There is in fact an urgent need to pursue a credible and sustained peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan aimed at finding a negotiated peace. Pakistan's participation in all regional and international forums on peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan is a reflection of my country's commitment and unflinching support to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process.

Apart from Afghanistan, it is Pakistan that has the most to gain from peace in Afghanistan. We continue to host the largest protracted presence of refugees anywhere in the world. Approximately 3 million refugees still reside in my country. My country has also been a major victim of terrorism and violence emanating from Afghanistan's strife and wars. We have fought and are defeating terrorism within Pakistan. Pakistan's counter-terrorism campaign — the largest in the world, with a 200,000-strong deployed military force — has turned the tide of terrorism in Pakistan.

But our ability to totally eliminate terrorist acts in Pakistan depends upon the effective control over our long border with Afghanistan. We have enforced stringent border management measures on our side of the border. We look forward to Afghanistan matching what we have done on their side of the border. We are also committed to not allow Pakistan's soil to be used for attacks against any country.

In conclusion, the path to peace and development in Afghanistan is arduous, but achievable. While the international community, including Pakistan and Afghanistan's other neighbours and the Central Asian States, can help in promoting a peace process and assist the country with its development agenda, ultimately the principal responsibility for achieving peace rests on the Afghans themselves. As far as my country is concerned, we stand ready and committed to extend our full cooperation bilaterally and within the various regional frameworks to promote peace and security in Afghanistan.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Joanne Adamson, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Ms. Adamson: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to thank the Kazakh presidency of the Security Council, and in particular its Minister for Foreign Affairs, for convening this debate, which provides a good opportunity to share views, best practices and experiences on a very topical subject, as well as to take stock of initiatives, both planed and ongoing, that support international peace through regional cooperation.

The EU and Central Asia have a common interest in Afghanistan's security and prosperity. International and regional support to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned inclusive peace process is essential. In that respect, the contribution of the countries of Central Asia, as direct neighbours, is crucial for the success of any meaningful peaceful settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan. In our view, any stabilization strategy requires a solid regional approach. The EU stands ready to support the Afghan stakeholders themselves in providing a conducive environment for an intra-Afghan peace process. The EU supports the Afghan Kabul Process on Peace and Security, of which the next meeting is planned for 28 February. From that meeting, the EU would expect tangible progress on the way forward towards a peaceful settlement with the Taliban.

Reinforced regional cooperation is key to lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region. Such cooperation is indispensable for sustainable development. Afghanistan continues to engage with its neighbours through international forums, such as the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan. The EU strongly supports such regional forums to facilitate economic and political cooperation among all regional stakeholders.

We believe that the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia in Ashgabat has an important role to play in supporting countries in the region, including Afghanistan, in dealing with the common challenges related to security and development. In that context, connectivity, which is also part of the EU's global strategy, is key to success. The EU supports efforts by Central Asian countries to facilitate trade and provide energy resources to Afghanistan. Afghanistan's own infrastructure and connectivity programme aims to develop transit and connectivity.

The Lapis Lazuli Corridor railway, between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey; the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline; the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project; and the regional water management and cross-border water management of the Kunar River basin are all important connectivity projects for Afghanistan. They will have an important long-term positive impact and are also in the interest of the international community. Indeed, better connectivity for Afghanistan and its citizens could lead to improved economic development and infrastructure. That will eventually allow for a reduction of both international development aid to the country and the influx of migrants and refugees to the region and beyond. Politically, it could help to bring regional partners to engage positively in Afghanistan and to contribute to a more stable and peaceful Afghanistan.

The EU remains determined to counter all forms of terrorism, including the growing threat posed by affiliates of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), as well as violent extremism, as fundamental threats to regional and international peace and stability. In that regard, in 2017, the EU decided to provide more support to Central Asia in the area of counter-terrorism. A new regional project is being launched on conflict-sensitive reporting to support local media in positive action in favour of peace and security and against radicalization attempts and narratives. Similarly, there is a need to enhance data protection and internet governance. Terrorists use information and communication technologies to recruit, finance, intimidate, and disseminate their messages. A crucial element in counter-terrorism policies is finding a sustainable balance between freedom and security in order to prevent the re-emergence of ISIL affiliates. That is also important in Central Asia and Afghanistan. The EU is committed to achieving both. However, the debate on security versus freedom remains a work in progress.

Threats from the nexus between terrorism and organized crime, including drug trafficking used for the financing of terrorism affecting all countries of the region, can be confronted only through increased political, economic and security cooperation. The EU is supporting the regional programme of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime that covers Afghanistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The EU also supports Central Asian partners in the fight against drugs through a regional Central Asia drug action programme and a transregional programme, namely, the EU Action against Drugs and Organised Crime.

Finally, the EU has been supporting regional cooperation at the level of border guards in order to help Afghanistan to foster regional cooperation and facilitate secure trade links with its neighbours, especially Central Asia. In that context, the EU Border Management Northern Afghanistan project assists Afghan border police in better securing the country's northern border in order to improve cross-border cooperation, reduce crime and improve legal trade, travel and commerce along Afghanistan's border with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, complementing similar programmes in Central Asia.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important debate immediately following the Security Council mission to Afghanistan, which was realized under Kazakhstan's strong initiative. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

The Secretary-General's visit to Kabul in June 2017 and the strategic review were both important milestones in developing the relationship between Afghanistan and the United Nations. We appreciate the excellent efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in fulfilling its existing mandate. However, the emphasis on peace and conflict, which the review encourages, will require some changes in UNAMA's configuration. The discussion about the mandate renewal will be held mainly by Council members, but Japan hopes that the voices of various stakeholders with great interest in today's discussion will also be considered.

Japan has been engaged in efforts to resolve various problems facing Afghanistan and Central Asia. We are striving to achieve sustainable peace and development in that region. It is regrettable that the security situation in Afghanistan is still volatile, despite enormous efforts by the Afghan Government and assistance from the international community, and that it poses a threat to Central Asia. Japan's position that only genuine progress on an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process will be able to provide significant security improvements remains unchanged. Japan calls on Afghanistan and other regional stakeholders to be united in seeking tangible outcomes in the second round of the Kabul Process, to take place in February.

In our efforts to address the security-development nexus in Afghanistan and Central Asia, Japan has been paying particular attention to the development of human resources. We have repeatedly emphasized our belief that Afghanistan's potential and its human resources can lay the foundation for economic development and self-reliance and enhance the capability of future Government operations. In September 2017, Afghanistan celebrated the launch of work on the new Kabul City, where we expect more than 250,000 residential units to be built over the next 30 years. It was our pleasure to have supported the capacity-building of the many experts who conducted the research and planning for that important project.

The main objective of long-term Japan-United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime coordination is to establish border liaison offices on drugs and crime and train drug enforcement agents. We believe that trainees from Central Asia and Afghanistan will play key roles in preventing and countering violent extremism in the region. Japan will continue those initiatives.

I believe that the stakeholders participating in today's debate are united in supporting Afghanistan because a stable and prosperous Afghanistan is not only of interest to the region, but also to the entire international community. Our willingness to extend assistance to a self-reliant Afghanistan is underpinned by international agreements, including relevant Security Council resolutions and the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework. As we fulfil our commitments, we look forward to seeing tangible outcomes from Afghanistan. We must see progress in the peace process in 2018, as well as in the parliamentary and district council elections. Japan will continue to do its part for a better future for Afghanistan and its people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Biagini (Italy): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Kazakhstan on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January, and thank it for convening this very timely and important meeting. We also welcome the adoption of the presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/2) on this occasion.

We align ourselves with the statement just delivered by the observer of the European Union.

Regional partnerships play a primary role in addressing the security and development challenges facing Afghanistan. The countries and the peoples of Central Asia share a common history of rich and interdependent relations in the political, cultural and economic domains, with Afghanistan at its core — the heart of Asia, in the true sense of the term. The complex patchwork of transnational threats, challenges and opportunities facing the Central Asian region is today having a direct impact on the situation in Afghanistan and on the prospects for long-term civilization and development. I would like to address three main aspects.

First of all, I note the threats to security from terrorists and violent extremist groups operating in Afghanistan. In the framework of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission, Italy continues to stand side by side with our Afghan partners in order to enhance the capabilities of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. At the same time, in our view, there is a need for a broader strategy that adequately addresses the complex and transnational nature of the terrorist phenomenon. A constructive role for all regional neighbours and stakeholders is therefore essential in countering the threat of terrorism and violent extremism, including by denying such groups any form of safe haven. The next meeting of the Kabul Process, which we fully support, can provide the necessary political momentum to those common efforts, which must be accompanied by renewed commitment to making progress on an Afghan-led and -owned peace and reconciliation process.

Secondly, the threat of terrorism and its sources of financing is also very closely linked to the issue of drug trafficking. We are very concerned about the

latest developments reflected in the recently published report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) entitled *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017*, which notes a very large increase in opium cultivation. Italy supports various initiatives in that regard, such as the UNODC regional programme for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. We are also engaged in successful triangular cooperation in order to enhance the capabilities of Afghan police officers in the area of counter-narcotics.

Thirdly, on regional integration and economic development, we strongly support the National Unity Government's vision for Afghanistan as a crossroads for trade and infrastructure in Central Asia. Interconnectivity is key to achieving sustained growth and development in Afghanistan and in the region. Italy is therefore proud of its long-term commitment to making that vision a reality — including by channelling a great part of its long-standing civilian assistance to Afghanistan to the financing of strategic transport and communication infrastructure projects, in particular in the western region of the country.

Regional mechanisms and organizations can play a crucial role in all of those areas and provide a platform to develop regional capacities and build mutual confidence. In that regard, we commend and support the role and initiatives of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia.

I would like to conclude by reiterating the need for a comprehensive approach to the stabilization and prosperity of the region by linking security and development.

The meeting rose at 2.05 p.m.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Mali

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2017/1105)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Mali to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Tiéman Hubert Coulibaly, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Mali.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/1105, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lacroix.

Mr. Lacroix (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to introduce the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/1105) on the situation in Mali to the members of the Security Council, and update them on the most recent developments concerning the political and security situation in the country.

I would also like to welcome the presence today of the new Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Mali, His Excellency Mr. Tiéman Hubert Coulibaly, whom I warmly congratulate on his appointment. I should like to convey through the Minister to the new Government our every wish for its success, and to reiterate to him our readiness and that of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) to support him in his work, especially with regard to the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali.

The adoption of a timeline for implementing urgent measures within the framework of the Peace Agreement at the last meeting of the Agreement Monitoring Committee on 15 and 16 January was an important step. That timeline includes an entire series of measures that should allow progress with regard to institutional measures, including, in particular ensuring that the Territorial Communities Code conforms with the Peace Agreement, and the operationalization of the interim authorities and the transitional electoral colleges, as well as the local Governments in the Ménaka and Taoudénni regions, by March. The timeline could also help advance security arrangements, including the operationalization of the Operational Coordination Mechanisms of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu, the finalization of the criteria for the integration of former combatants into the armed and security forces, the further development of security sector reform strategy and the establishment of security conditions for the upcoming elections. The timetable could finally revive development for the northern regions.

However, with the holding of presidential elections, scheduled for mid-July, less than six months away, it is now important that the Government and the signatory movements make every effort to respect that new timetable. Almost a year ago, on 10 February 2017, the then Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria, His Excellency Mr. Ramtane Lamamra, as chief mediator, presided over a high-level ministerial meeting of the Agreement Monitoring Committee, which resulted in a road map for installing the interim authorities and initiating joint patrols, as well as the establishment of a permanent consultation framework comprised of the signatory parties, international mediators and key partners. Unfortunately, it is clear today that those measures have not been followed up.

I welcome the fact that the first trip by Mr. Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga, the new Prime Minister of Mali, appointed on 30 December, was slated for Algeria, the lead mediator. We hope that consultations with the Algerian authorities will give awaited impetus to talks with the other signatory parties with a view to overcoming the differences observed over the past several months. In particular, I highlight the controversy related to the Territorial Communities Code, as well as persistent divergences concerning the issue of quota requirements for the integration of former combatants into the armed and security forces, which are essential for the launch of the cantonment and security sector reform.

It is also hoped that constructive consultations among the parties, following the meeting of the Agreement Monitoring Committee of January 15 and 16, will enable them, in the days to come, to adhere to the timetable agreed at that meeting. That is essential to ensuring coherence between the Peace Agreement and the legal framework concerning decentralization and to laying the groundwork for the holding of local and regional elections in April 2018 in an optimal security conditions.

In the same vein, I would like to encourage the signatory parties to dedicate the coming months to developing a road map articulating their vision for new Malian defence and security institutions and the various stages of the reform. A consensus on the next steps would enable the launching of the cantonment and demobilization, disarmament and reintegration processes and thereby help reduce insecurity in the northern regions.

Time is short, and we are facing a constant race against time in Mali. We are facing increasing insecurity that has unfortunately cost the lives of hundreds of civilians in the northern and central parts of the country, as well as dozens of members of the Malian defence and security forces, Blue Helmets and contingents of Operation Barkhane over the past year. We are also facing a worsening human rights and humanitarian situations in the country. The fact that, after more than two years following the signing of the peace agreement, the northern development strategy project has not been adopted means that a large percentage of those living in the north has been deprived of long-awaited peace dividends. Humanitarian actors estimate that by 2018, 4.1 million Malians — or 22 per cent of the population — will be food insecure. The estimated percentage is even higher for the northern and central regions where 30 to 40 per cent of the population would be affected.

As members of the Security Council saw for themselves during their visit in October 2017, the challenges remain considerable, and, as I have said, our goal must be to establish conditions conducive to the holding of elections and, beyond them, pursuing the peace process. To that end, I encourage the Government to launch the implementation of the agreement's key measures — decentralization and security sector reform — in a concerted and inclusive manner. In that regard, I would like to assure the Government of the continued support of MINUSMA, under the leadership of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mahamat Saleh Annadif, who is sparing no effort in exercising his good offices.

(*spoke in English*)

As was previously mentioned, the report under consideration highlights the continued worsening of the situation in the centre of the country with the highest number of terrorist attacks documented in the Mopti region. The Government is making efforts in that regard. Prime Minister Maïga convened a Cabinet meeting devoted to addressing insecurity in the central region and the national coordination body's integrated plan for securing the centre of the country is now operational. For its part, MINUSMA has enhanced its support for the Malian defence and security forces in central Mali following the signature of the memorandum of understanding with the Government on 8 November. The Mission is helping upgrade the security of six Malian armed forces bases for an estimated cost of $1 million, as well as continuing to assist with casualty and medical evacuations.

I would also like to welcome the progress made in the operationalization of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), which has launched its second operation, as well as the establishment by the G-5 Sahel secretariat of a coordination cell to provide political oversight to the operations of the Joint Force. As recommended by the Secretary-General in his October report (S/2017/811), we would also advise that the groupe de soutien be activated to ensure unity of vision and purpose among all stakeholders. Meanwhile, consultations for the conclusion of the technical agreement among the G-5 Sahel, the United Nations and the European Union are progressing, and we intend to work closely with the European Union and the African Union on a joint resource mobilization strategy before the donors conference of 23 February in Brussels in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2391 (2017).

Development partners are also stepping up their efforts. Since October 2017, the Peace Building Fund launched four projects focused on the Mopti and Ségou regions for a total of $8 million. Those projects are aimed at enhancing the participation of women and youth in reconciliation efforts and preventing intercommunity conflicts, including by restoring traditional conflict mediation mechanisms. However, most of those initiatives remain in the inception phase, and have yet

to produce significant changes on the ground. For the future, central Mali is likely to command sustained attention and become an increasingly prominent feature in peace and reconciliation efforts.

The upcoming presidential elections will mark the beginning of a new chapter in the stabilization of Mali. The modest achievements made to date in the implementation of the Peace Agreement that forms the cornerstone of the Mission's mandate, the entry into function of the independent observer, the operationalization of the sanctions regime, the establishment of the international commission of inquiry, the upcoming presidential elections, the continued security risks facing our personnel on the ground, the growth of insecurity spanning towards the centre of the country and the deployment of a new regional force by the G-5 Sahel make the independent review requested by the Secretary-General particularly timely.

Allow me here to welcome the participation of the Carter Center, for the first time, in the Agreement Monitoring Committee meeting held last week, the recent nomination of the Panel of Experts mandated by resolution 2374 (2017) and the Secretary-General's decision to establish the international commission of inquiry, of which he informed the Security Council by letter yesterday. The independent observer will identify blockages, apportion responsibility and make recommendations for the way forward. The Panel of Experts will support the Committee in identifying and imposing sanctions against individuals hampering the implementation of the agreement. It will also help to shed light on the links between international organized crime, terrorist groups and signatory armed groups. The International Commission of Inquiry will investigate serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law committed in Mali since January 2012. Its establishment represents an important step forward in the implementation of the justice and reconciliation measures outlined in the Agreement, and in efforts to fight impunity.

Five years after the Mission's establishment and two and a half years after the signature of the peace agreement, we believe the time has come to re-assess the assumptions about MINUSMA's presence, review its key mandated tasks against its achievements on the ground and re-examine the Mission's layout for a comprehensive strategic review. I must note that resolution 2364 (2017) had requested that MINUSMA develop within six months a mission-wide prioritization plan articulating a phased approach to mandate implementation and a transition plan. However, we felt that to ensure maximum impact, it would be important that the two plans be informed by the findings of the strategic review to be conducted in the coming weeks. We therefore believe that the two plans will remain living documents until the conclusion of the strategic review can be incorporated. In the meantime, MINUSMA continues to focus on core-mandated tasks, with notable achievement in its good offices and the protection of civilian efforts.

In spite of persisting capability gaps, including for crucial assets, such as helicopters, MINUSMA is pursuing its effort to project the robust posture mandated by the Security Council. Since the beginning of the year, peacekeepers repelled three attacks against one position in Kidal region and one ambush in Mopti region, and three improvised explosive devices exploded against Mission vehicles. I am pleased to report that such attacks resulted in only minor injuries to two peacekeepers. We also note that the mitigation measures implemented by the Mission are having a positive impact. However, such endeavours are long-term. The review on peacekeeping fatalities recently conducted by Lieutenant General Cruz and our plan of action highlight the importance of enhancing our efforts and ensuring that all peacekeepers receive the training and equipment necessary to operate in such hostile conditions. We are currently working with MINUSMA to take all necessary measures to implement the recommendations outlined in that report.

The President: I thank Mr. Lacroix for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Security Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, for his briefing, which, as usual, was very clear, and again highlighted that the situation in Mali is at a determining juncture.

I would also like to warmly welcome the Malian Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, His Excellency Mr. Tiéman Hubert Coulibaly, and thank him for traveling to New York to participate in our work. It is an important gesture that France and, I believe, all members of the Council appreciate.

More than two and a half years after the signature of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, it must be acknowledged that much remains to be done to ensure its full implementation. Indeed, it has an impact on the ground. Now, more than ever, it is time for all parties to make headway in honouring their respective commitments. It is all the more important now that there is a small window of opportunity ahead of the 2018 elections in Mali. The security situation in the north and centre of the country remains a source of genuine concern for all. Without progress, all of the gains made thus far, as well as the very relevance of the agreement, will be called into question.

Sustainable development in the Sahel will be impossible without the full implementation of the Malian peace agreement. In that regard, France welcomes the renewed commitment on the part of Malian Government and signatory movements to implement all provisions of the peace agreement, through the adoption a few days ago of an emergency plan with a specific calendar to ensure that, by March, each party will have honoured its commitments. It is an encouraging step forward that has been eagerly waited for some time. It should allow for considerable short-term progress to be made in implementing the agreement. We must move from words to deeds and ensure that commitments are upheld with specific measures on the ground. It is particularly important for progress to be made in the area of decentralization, by conducting a consensus-based review of legislation with regard to decentralization, adopting a law to establish a regional police force and providing interim authorities with the human, technical and financial resources required to fulfil their mission.

The launching of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process is also a priority, given the eligibility criteria and quotas for combatants. In the coming weeks we will continue to monitor the various points closely, in conjunction with Malian stakeholders. France also encourages the Malian authorities to make headway in the fight against impunity. It calls upon all parties to end human rights violations.

In accordance with the terms of the peace agreement, the Council must take the necessary measures that will encourage the parties to uphold their commitments. The adoption in September 2017 of resolution 2374 (2017), establishing a sanctions regime for Mali, was the first step in that direction. Additional measures should be envisaged if the recent commitments made by the parties are not honoured, including imposing sanctions on individuals who hamper the implementation of the agreement. France is ready to shoulder its responsibility in that area. The future reports of the Panel of Experts and the independent observer, whose appointments we welcome, will lay the foundation to move in that direction if need be. All Malian parties must shoulder their responsibilities.

The countries of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) continue to work together to combat the existential threat that terrorism poses to their peoples and States. Last week, another step was made to make the G-5 Sahel Joint Force operational by launching a specific road map for troop deployment, command transfers and future operations. Now more than ever, the goal is to send swift and positive signals about the path to stability in the G-5 Sahel countries by confirming, in particular, the return of Government and public services throughout the country.

In New York, our priority must be to do our utmost to ensure that the technical agreement outlined in resolution 2391 (2017) can be signed at the international donors' conference to be held on 23 February in Brussels, in order to gather the necessary resources to finance the support of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) to the Joint Force. It will be achieved by a mechanism hosted by the European Union and should be fed by international contributions, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2391 (2017).

Finally, a solid framework that promotes respect for human rights remains an important prerequisite for the success of the joint force. We therefore encourage the G-5 Sahel countries to establish, as soon as possible, the compliance framework outlined in resolution 2391 (2017) so as to build on progress made in that area in the coming weeks. It is the best way to ensure that MINUSMA can support the joint force, in accordance the United Nations human rights criteria.

In spite of all its challenges, MINUSMA, along with other security forces on the ground, remains a crucial element for ensuring Mali's stability. In the short term, our responsibility is to mobilize to provide MINUSMA with all the means it needs to fulfil the robust mandate it has received from the Council. The priority in that regard lies in the immediate deployment on the ground of adapted capacities in order to endow the force with its full operational strength in the coming months. Lasting solutions must be found quickly so as

to adequately equip contingents with armored vehicles, medium-term aerial capacities and armored convoys.

Finally, the strategic review of MINUSMA to take place in the coming weeks will provide us with an opportunity for more long-term consideration of the future of the Mission and its coordination with other security forces in place, first and foremost among which is the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel. Mali and the Sahel are optimal theatres for building the future of peacekeeping. They offer us the opportunity to work to establish a virtuous coordination between a United Nations and an African operation. That will be possible, however, only if both enjoy the necessary tools and support from the international community.

As I have already had the opportunity to underscore this morning, it is now urgent to make progress towards the full implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. It is the Council's responsibility to send a strong message of encouragement to the Malian parties in that regard. France will today submit a proposal to the other members of the Council on a draft presidential statement to that end.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia thanks Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his briefing.

We join our colleagues from France in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Tiéman Hubert Coulibaly, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Republic of Mali.

At the outset, I wish to highlight the political progress made in Mali. We note with some hope that the consolidation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali is moving ahead with essential steps that will without doubt also encourage the Security Council, the international community and, of course, the Malian people and Government to pursue their efforts in favour of peace and lasting stability in that brotherly country.

In that regard, we note the definitive cessation of hostilities between the armed groups through the signature of the document of commitments, which provides for a resumption of dialogue towards the full implementation of the peace and reconciliation agreement and an increase in confidence-building measures for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of the fighters. Furthermore, we note the latest meeting of the Agreement Monitoring Committee in Bamako, which took place early last week and at which the parties agreed a revised, prioritized schedule for the implementation of the pending provisions of the peace and reconciliation agreement, to be undertaken by the end of March. We consider these commitments to be an important initiative that must be secured in a decisive way. We welcome the efforts of the Government and the President of the Republic of Mali to achieve the definitive cessation of hostilities through national plans and the taking of fundamental policy measures to achieve peace and stability in their country.

It is important to reiterate and recognize that the impact of the Libyan conflict on the security situation in the region is a direct consequence of interventionist practices and policies of regime change that have had a collateral effect in the Sahel, engendering a rise in chaos and terrorism, with regrettable results that continue to reverberate to this day.

We view with concern that asymmetric terrorist attacks perpetrated with small arms and improvised explosive devices continue to threaten the integrity and life of the civilian population, the Malian security forces, State authorities and the members of MINUSMA, not to mention the fact that they have propagated and entrenched the presence and consequences of transnational crime in the subregion.

We therefore consider it necessary to highlight and recognize the tasks undertaken by the personnel of the MINUSMA, which has stepped up its work in for the final implementation of the peace agreement by monitoring and facilitating the political dialogue through mediation and good offices, in coordination with the Malian Government. We commend the activities of the Mission in the provision of technical, logistical and security advice for the preparation of future electoral processes in Mali. Furthermore, we attach importance to the signing of the memorandum of understanding with the Malian Government, which will offer support to the armed forces in the areas of operations, intelligence, medical evacuation, the elimination and handling of explosive artifacts, demining and the protection of civilians.

However, despite all the efforts carried out by the Mission, we are concerned about the ongoing lack of material, logistical and technological capabilities that would allow it to efficiently and effectively fulfil its mandate in a volatile and asymmetric environment.

On the other hand, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate due to violent terrorist attacks, with their collateral and very grave effects, which have increased the number of internally displaced and refugees in border countries. Another collateral effect we would note is food insecurity, which keeps hundreds of thousands of people at risk, among them more than 10,000 children suffering severe malnutrition. Vulnerability remains highest among minors, who are marginalized and deprived of their fundamental rights, including to education, due to the closure of hundreds of schools as a result of terrorist threats.

In that respect, it is clear that the security situation in Mali and the Sahel still presents great challenges. Bolivia highlights the essential efforts carried out by the regional and subregional organizations, led by the African Union, in cooperation and coordination with the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel, which we consider to be critical to the fight against transnational criminal groups and to providing broader and better security conditions to the civilian population.

To conclude, we urge the international community in general to pursue its efforts to achieve lasting peace and stability in Mali. We believe that support for the Malian Government is the fundamental pillar that should motivate us to achieve definitive peace, in strict respect for and dedication to its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his briefing on the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/1105) on progress made in the political process in Mali and the activities of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

Before I go on, I wish to hail the presence among us of His Excellency Mr. Tiéman Hubert Coulibaly, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Republic of Mali. I ask him to accept the Ivorian delegation's welcome and its congratulations on his new assigment to lead the Malian diplomatic corps.

Mr. Lacroix's briefing described a situation of contrasts that calls for the Council's ongoing vigilance and strengthened support for MINUSMA in the implementation of its mandate. My country attaches the highest importance to developments in the situation in Mali, in particular the political process, and welcomes the efforts and resolve of the Government to promote the comprehensive and inclusive implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, which is the sole framework for resolving the crisis in that country. My delegation shares the conclusions of the Secretary-General on the need for the Malian parties to step up their implementation of the Agreement, which has been delayed significantly. This could threaten the holding of upcoming local and presidential elections. Time is running out and the implementation of the peace agreement by the next elections will be key to ensuring a peaceful and credible electoral process.

With MINUSMA's support, focus should be placed on the redeployment of the Administration; decentralization; security sector reform; and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. In that regard, we encourage the Agreement Monitoring Committee to fully play its role and to lead the Malian parties to resolutely assume ownership of the Algiers road map. The presence of Algeria, the leader of the international mediation efforts, and the presence of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General as observers in the Agreement Monitoring Committee is an important step forward and a sign of openness that will strengthen the Committee's effectiveness.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the Malian Government's determination to involve neighbouring countries, in particular Algeria, in implementing the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. In this connection, the Council should encourage the region and the neighbouring countries of Mali to work closely with Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mr. Mahamat Saleh Annadif to reach a definitive solution to the crisis in Mali.

My delegation welcomes the cessation of hostilities agreement signed on 20 September 2017 by the various signatory movements of the peace agreement and encourages the stakeholders to ensure its effective implementation in order to contribute to improving the security situation in the country. However, Côte d'Ivoire is worried about the serious deterioration of the security situation in the centre of the country and the real risks of the terrorist attacks spreading to the south. In this regard, my delegation calls for the operationalization of MINUSMA's rapid reaction force as soon as possible and for the fulfilment of the Mission's need for helicopters.

Côte d'Ivoire also calls on Member States to make available to MINUSMA appropriate means

to secure the camps and convoys against attacks by terrorists groups, which have cost the lives of too many peacekeepers deployed in Mali. Furthermore, my country urges MINUSMA and the partners of Mali to support the efforts of the Government in the context of the deployment of Malian defence and security forces, in particular to the north and centre of the country. We must ensure that the Government of Mali has the necessary support its army needs in order to protect the people and territory of Mali. The presence of these forces will prevent a the armed groups from becoming permanently entrenched and, as a result, it will prevent to the perpetration human rights violations. It will also facilitate the redeployment of the Administration and essential social services.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the signing on 8 November 2017 of the agreement memorandum with the Malian Government in order to ensure MINUSMA's support for the Malian armed forces, in particular in the area of strengthening logistical and operational capabilities, exchanges of information and intelligence, medical evacuations and the deactivation of explosives and munitions. Peace and security and in Mali will be lasting only if terrorist groups and criminals are neutralized. For this to happen, it will depend on the effectiveness of the force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) in its war against the terrorist groups.

Côte d'Ivoire is delighted about the convergence of views and the unity of action of Council members regarding the support of MINUSMA to the G-5 Sahel Joint Force and calls on the Council to go even further in ensuring its support so that we can make sure that MINUSMA does not continue to be the target of terrorist attacks. Côte d'Ivoire hopes that, in accordance with resolution 2391 (2017), the technical agreement between the United Nations, the European Union and the G-5 Sahel countries will be signed.

The Ivorian delegation welcomes the progress achieved in the implementation of MINUSMA'S mandate in an increasingly complex environment. However, we would like to express our serious concerns about the ongoing serious human rights violations, in particular in the north and centre of Mali, as well as the increasing asymmetric attacks against MINUSMA personnel.

Looking beyond the security situation, my country commends the commitment of MINUSMA and the Government of Mali to the implementation of the road map in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular by reducing inequalities and eliminating poverty in order to improve the living conditions of the people of Mali. Côte d'Ivoire agrees with the Secretary-General that it is necessary to address the root causes of the conflict to build a foundation for peace and security.

In conclusion, my country would like to reiterate that there can be no military solution to the crisis in Mali and that the parties should commit themselves resolutely to implementing in good faith the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation, which is the solution that was chosen by the people of Mali themselves. Côte d'Ivoire believes in the capacity of all the parties to overcome their differences in the interest of the people and nation of Mali.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I want to begin by thank Under-Secretary-General Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix for his comprehensive briefing to the Council today and express our thanks to the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/1105) and to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mr. Annadif and his team for their excellent work on the ground. I also want to welcome and express my appreciation for the presence today in the Council of Minister Coulibaly.

It has now been over two and a half years since the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali was signed. Progress on its implementation has been mixed, yet tangible progress in the peace process is the only way to achieve lasting stability in Mali and indeed in the region. This is all the more urgent in light of the grave security situation, characterized by increased and intense fire attacks by terrorists groups. It is clear that only a comprehensive approach, anchored in the peace process and which addresses is the root causes of violence and instability, will resolve the security situation in Mali in a lasting way.

We welcome the adoption of the revised timetable for the implementation of the peace agreement. The agreement represents a closing window of opportunity which, if not grasped, would undermine the progress already made and put into question the potential for peace and reconciliation. It is therefore essential that the parties honour their commitments under the peace agreement in good faith, in a concrete and substantive way and without further delay.

As part of this, they should engage in confidence-building measures. This is critical not

least to prepare the ground for credible and inclusive elections due to take place in 2018. Greater national ownership of the key institutional reforms envisaged in the peace agreement is essential. We call on all parties to play their part, in particular to ensure progress in the decentralization and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and the security sector reform processes. We hope that the newly appointed Prime Minister Maïga will fully assume his responsibilities and lead the way in an inclusive manner.

With the recent appointment of the Carter Center in the role of independent observer and the establishment of the sanctions regime last year, all the tools needed to support the implementation process of the peace agreement are now in place. Albeit different in nature, those tools all serve to assist and to help the parties in their endeavours. We encourage them to support them and to use them as they go about their work.

The full representation of women in the decision-making structures related to the peace process has been lacking. Yet women have an important role to play in the implementation of the peace agreement. We welcome the recent steps by the mediation group of the Agreement's follow-up mechanism, the Agreement Monitoring Committee, to consult more with women. It is important that that dialogue be continued and that the inclusion of women in the peace process be further institutionalized.

The human rights situation in Mali continues to be of serious concern, not least due to the expansion of violent extremist groups. The Malian Government has the responsibility to ensure accountability for human rights abuses and access to justice for all, including by prioritizing the reconciliation and justice measures of the peace agreement. We welcome the decision of the Secretary-General to establish the International Commission of Inquiry to investigate the allegations of abuse and serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including the allegations of conflict-related sexual violence committed on the territory of Mali since 1 January 2012.

We welcome the continued support of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) to the operationalization of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission and the high number of additional statements submitted to the Commission, although we are concerned that progress remains slow. The severe human rights situation also highlights the significance of a robust compliance framework for the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), which should be operationalized promptly.

We look forward to receiving further information on the transition plan for MINUSMA and on the recommendations for the upcoming strategic review. That is an important exercise, coming five years after the inception of the Mission, and provides an opportunity to reflect, including by revisiting its configuration and geographical distribution.

We join the Secretary-General in commending the commitment of the States members of the G-5 Sahel to addressing threats to peace and security in the region through the establishment of the joint force. We see the potential of the force to contribute to an enabling environment that increases security. Given the complementarity roles of the G-5 Sahel force and MINUSMA, it is important that United Nations support to the joint force through MINUSMA not affect the Mission's capacity to implement its mandate and strategic priorities.

By redoubling their efforts to implement the peace agreement, the parties in Mali can help to ensure successful elections later this year. That, in turn, has the potential to reinvigorate the peace process and to create the conditions for State authority to be extended across the whole of the country. It is very important that all parties to the Agreement remain committed and intensify their efforts for successful implementation.

MINUSMA continues to have an important role to play in support of national efforts inside Mali. We are proud to support its work with our largest current military troop contribution to any international mission, as well as with police and civilian staff. Sweden remains committed to supporting a peaceful, resilient and inclusive Mali for all its citizens.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his very useful briefing. I would also like to welcome the presence of Mr. Tiéman Hubert Coulibaly, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

Peru notes with concern the situation in Mali. As a non-permanent member of the Council, we hope

to contrbute to strengthening the commitment of the international community to national actors with a view to supporting their efforts to achieve sustainable peace in that country. We believe that the humanitarian situation facing the civilian population is serious, as is the recurrence of heinous violations of human rights in Mali, in particular in the central and northern regions owing to the actions of terrorist groups, clashes between the various armed groups and a lack of State presence.

Peru recognizes and supports the work carried out by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) amid an adverse environment and in complex operational situations. I would now like to briefly mention the political and security aspects, in which it is urgent to make progress with greater speed.

First, on the political front, almost three years since the signing of the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, it is necessary to make it a reality. The establishment of a timetable for that is a step in the right direction. However, it is necessary to accelerate the pace. The holding of free and transparent elections is a central objective, which must have strong regional and international support. An increased participation of women and young people should help to build and strengthen the inclusive institutions required to sustain peace. We also believe it important to move forward as soon as possible with the constitutional review process in order to establish the necessary order for national institutions to provide security and justice in the country, in line with the peace and reconciliation agreement.

Along those lines, we welcome the recent decision of the Secretary-General to establish the International Commission of Inquiry and to request the Malian authorities to look into abuses and violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law, including conflict-related sexual violence. We support the fight against impunity and implementation of the rule of law in Mali.

Secondly, in the area of security, Peru highlights the importance of adopting a regional perspective that addresses in an integrated and multidimensional way the root causes of the conflict, including the link between terrorism and drug trafficking, organized crime, human trafficking and other criminal activities. We also emphasize the need to move forward with the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes for former combatants and to create decent employment to prevent the resurgence of violence.

Peru considers the mandate given to MINUSMA to provide operational and logistical support to the Joint Force of the Group of Five of the Sahel to be positive. At the same time, we believe that the operational capabilities of the Mission should be strengthened. We note with concern that the entire authorized force has not yet been deployed and that there is a significant deficit in its equipment. In that regard, we highlight the need to guarantee the safety of the Blue Helmets on the ground. Mali represents one of the most dangerous environments. That is why we support the Secretary-General's decision to address that cross-cutting issue of many peacekeeping operations.

To conclude, we believe that sustainable development is inseparable from peace and security. In that regard, it could be of interest to include in future reports figures for economic growth, which have been good, with social indicators that give a clearer idea of the challenges facing Mali in the area of sustainable development, which we all support.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): We would first like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mr. Lacroix for his very useful briefing on recent events in Mali. I would also like to join my colleagues in welcoming Mr. Coulibaly, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali. It goes without saying that the presence among us of Mr. Coulibaly demonstrates the Malian Government's commitment to finding an appropriate solution to the current situation.

We warmly welcome the positive measures taken by the Government in the areas of defence, justice, security and economic development. We encourage it to continue with such measures and to step up its efforts to implement the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. We call on all the parties to cooperate and participate in the process in order to ensure the implementation of the agreement and to address the common terrorist threat.

In that context, we support the amended timeline for the implementation of the agreement agreed to by the signatory parties at the most recent meeting of the Agreement Monitoring Committee in the capital of Mali, Bamako, on 16 January. We urge all the parties to implement the outstanding parts of the Agreement in accordance with the established timetable.

We deplore the extremely worrying deterioration of the situation in Mali. We commend the efforts of the peacekeepers, who risk their lives every day in their efforts to maintain peace and security in a dangerous environment, and 42 of whom died in 2017. It will be crucial to identify and address the underlying causes of the conflict if it is to be contained. Kuwait supports the commitment of the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad and the coalition of armed groups to the ceasefire since the signing of the latest agreement on 20 September. We call on all the parties to work to improve the security situation as quickly as possible.

We have been attentively and worriedly following the increases in terrorist attacks, the spread of extremist ideas and the targeting of peacekeepers and Malian security forces. We firmly condemn the terrorist activity in the region and emphasize the importance of the efforts of the Joint Force of the Group of Five (G-5) for the Sahel in fighting terrorism, ensuring border security and combating transborder crime. With regard to the Joint Force, we support resolution 2391 (2017) and call on the G-5 countries and the United Nations to put the finishing touches on the technical agreement aimed at facilitating the Joint Force's efforts, an initiative that is a successful, positive model of regional ownership in combating the various transborder threats. We welcome the active efforts in that regard of the Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Mali and commend their valuable contributions to the Joint Force.

Despite the current political situation and the deteroriating security conditions, Mali is seeing promising improvements in its economic development, according to the most recent briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, on 11 January (see S/PV.8156). We support the Government of Mali's efforts to cooperate with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in implementing projects aimed at creating job opportunities for the people of Mali and improving its economic situation. We also support the efforts to finalize a formula for the Government's plan for the Sustainable Development Goals. We wish the friendly people of Mali a prosperous future and reiterate our commitment to working with the other members of the Council to help them reach their goals. The country's economic development has created an opportunity for resolving various outstanding social and economic issues, and we call on the Government of Mali, with the support of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and MINUSMA, to pursue and promote that development by implementing the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, newly revitalized under the leadership of the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed.

We support the Secretary-General's decision to establish an International Commission of Inquiry in Mali, as expressed in a letter sent yesterday to the members of the Council, which says that the Commission of Inquiry will address flagrant violations and abuses of international human rights and international humanitarian law, including sexual violence related to the conflict, in accordance with the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation and with resolution 2364 (2017). We are committed to supporting the Secretary-General in his efforts to combat human rights violations.

Lastly, we commend the efforts of Special Representative Annadif and MINUSMA and affirm the importance of their role in stabilizing the situation and ensuring security for civilians. We emphasize the importance of their efforts to give technical, logistical and advisory support to the Government of Mali. We wish the Government every success in holding local and presidential elections this year and encourage it to ensure that elections are regular, transparent and open to the participation of every sector of Malian society.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would first like to thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his valuable briefing on the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), as well as Mr. Mahamat Saleh Annadif, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of MINUSMA, for his work in extremely difficult circumstances. We commend MINUSMA's mediation efforts and call on it to further strengthen its exercise of its good offices, in accordance with its mandate.

(*spoke in French*)

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome the presence here today of His Excellency Mr. Tiéman Hubert Coulibaly, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali.

(*spoke in English*)

Poland has been following the political situation in Mali and the Sahel closely. It is currently one of the world's most critical regions in the fight against

international terrorism. We share the concerns about the deteriorating security situation in the North and in central Mali in particular, with its spillover effects on Mali's neighbours. Stabilizing Mali politically and ensuring its territorial integrity will be crucial to maintaining peace and stability in the Sahel region. In the more than two and a half years since the signing of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, many of its provisions are still relevant. Building trust and overcoming barriers between the Government and other national stakeholders are essential to facilitating the electoral process. In that regard, we welcome the President of Mali's assurances that all the elections scheduled for 2018 — presidential, legislative and local — will be held in accordance with the constitutionally mandated deadlines. We should all realize that organizing elections in such an unstable security environment is challenging. Women should be included in every decision-making body related to the peace process, and I therefore welcome the compliance of all the political parties with the 30 per cent quota requirement for women in elective functions, as well as the representation of young people on the lists submitted for local and regional elections.

We encourage the Government of Mali to finalize a strategy for developing northern Mali and formulating a national emergency plan, as well as to adopt a timeline for implementing the Agreement, as part of the trust-building efforts among the stakeholders in the peace process. Constitutional revisions, security and justice reforms and a process of centralization are only some of the issues that must be addressed soon. We hope that the relevant African political actors and institutions, such as the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the African Development Bank and Mali's neighbours will continue their mediation efforts and support action aimed at effectively implementing the Malian peace process.

As a member of the European Union (EU), Poland welcomes the possibility of further cooperation with MINUSMA in the context of the operationalization of the Joint Force of the Group of Five (G-5) for the Sahel, based on resolution 2391 (2017). Progress is being made on efforts to conclude a technical agreement as soon as possible between the United Nations, the EU and the G-5 Sahel States.

In conclusion, Poland encourages all the parties in Mali to continue further political dialogue. We would also like to offer our full support to Special Representative Annadif and look forward to the conclusions of the upcoming MINUSMA strategic review.

Mr. Shen Bo (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes Mr. Coulibaly, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali, to today's meeting, and congratulates him on his assumption of his new role. I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his briefing.

China appreciates and supports the people of Mali and express its support to them in their determined efforts to actively advance their peace process and implement the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. Since the signing of the Peace Agreement, the Government of Mali, signatory armed groups and the relevant parties have made tremendous efforts to implement it, which has produced ongoing progress. China welcomes those developments.

Last October, a Security Council mission visited Mali and held fruitful talks with the relevant parties. At the same time, the current security situation in Mali continues to worsen. Terrorist activity in Mali and neighbouring areas is rampant, thereby seriously affecting the peace process. The international community should strengthen its efforts to support Mali's peace and reconciliation process and help the country achieve security, stability and economic and social development.

First, the international community should support the Malian parties to implement the Peace Agreement. China hopes that all parties to the Agreement will continue to demonstrate political will, fully implement the Agreement's provisions and jointly commit themselves to national development and reconstruction. The interim administration in northern Mali should provide basic services as soon as possible so that people in the region can lead better lives and enjoy a peace dividend. That will help to win the hearts of the people for the peace process. The international community should continue to help Mali to enhance its capacity for self-development and governance, on the basis of respecting Mali's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Secondly, the international community should help the Government of Mali to enhance its capacity in the areas of security and counter-terrorism efforts. It should also provide assistance to the Government, at its request, in order to enable it to respond to security

challenges throughout its territory and gradually assume its responsibility for national security.

With regard to the rampant terrorist activity, measures must be taken to adopt integrated steps to respond through regional cooperation. China welcomes the efforts of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) and other regional mechanisms and supports the establishment of a Joint Force to independently deal with regional security challenges. China urges the international community to respect the leading role of Africa in dealing with its own problems. China actively supports countries of the region in their effort to respond to the cross-border threats posed by terrorism and organized crime.

Thirdly, the international community should support the work of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). China thanks MINUSMA and Special Representative Annadif for their tireless efforts to help to advance peace and reconciliation in Mali. China hopes that MINUSMA will continue to coordinate and cooperate with the Government of Mali, respect Mali's suggestions and help the country strengthen its security capacity and assist with disarmament and reintegration efforts. MINUSMA is deployed in a complex and dangerous environment. Its peacekeepers are being attacked regularly, which is a severe safety and security issue.

There has recently been some improvement with regard to MINUSMA's equipment, but resources and capacity are still lagging. We hope that MINUSMA will continue to strengthen safety and security for its personnel and enhance communication with troop-contributing countries (TCCs) and other parties providing assistance in order to ensure that MINUSMA has the necessary equipment and resources to implement its mandate and defend itself. China thanks the Secretariat for its timely briefings on MINUSMA support for the G-5 Sahel Joint Force. We hope that it will continue to advance relevant work in that regard.

China firmly supports Mali in its efforts towards peace and development. China is an important TCC in MINUSMA, with nearly 400 peacekeepers deployed. We would like to work with the international community to continue to support Mali's peace and reconciliation process and to make our contribution to Mali's achievement of peace, stability and development.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): I wish to start by expressing our appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in Mali and on the activities of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). We continue to appreciate all of the efforts and sacrifices being made by MINUSMA peacekeepers, who, as we all know, operate under extremely difficult circumstances and continuously face asymetrial attacks by terrorists. They certainly deserve our support and solidarity. We are also pleased to see the new Foreign Minister of Mali, His Excellency Mr. Coulibaly. We look forward to hearing his maiden statement to the Security Council.

We note with satisfaction that no ceasefire violations by signatories to the greement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali have been reported since the previous briefing (see S/PV.8062). It is also encouraging that Malian political actors have been able to achive key stabilization objectives for the succesful establishment of interim authorities in all northern regions of the country and the launching of mixed patrols in Gao. Their discussions on finding a political settlement to the ongoing intercommunal conflict is also worth noting.

On the other hand, the challenges that Mali faces in relation to the deteriorating security situation remain a source of serious concern. In northern and central Mali, the repeated targeting of Malian civilian authorities by terrorists clearly serves to indicate their destructive intention to undermine State authority. We note from the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/1105) that the number of State officials redeployed to those regions showed a decreasing trend because of the prevailing insecurity. Reversing that situation is a major challenge, as observed during the Council's visit in October. There is no doubt that there is need for additional enhanced efforts to extend State authority in all territories of Mali.

With regard to the expansion of social services, the rehabilitation of health centres and schools and the digging of bore holes in the regions of Timbuktu, Ménaka, Gao and Taoudénni through domestic financing is encouraging. We call on international partners to help bridge funding gaps for the rehabilitation of infrastructure and equipment, which is a serious challenge that continues to affect the speed of the recovery process in the country.

We appreciate that the Peacebuilding Fund allocated a significant amount of resources to address the deteriorating security situation in the Ségou

and Mopti regions, including for reconciliation and conflict prevention.

Improving the logistics nightmare by opening the Cotonou-Niamey-Gao supply route in order to service camps in eastern and northern Mali, as well as the new centralized warehouse facility in Gao, has been a landmark achievement, as the whole process will significantly improve the delivery of humanitarian assistance and goods to the regions.

Strengthening of cooperation between the Malian armed forces and MINUSMA in the conduct of coordinated operations, logistics and operational support, including information- and intelligence-sharing, as well as planning and training, remain critical. It is only through such cooperation by MINUSMA and support by the United Nations country team that the Sustainable Development Goals in terms of a structural transformation of the economy and consolidating governance and security capacity can be achieved. In that spirit, we strongly support efforts in addressing the root causes of conflict through investment and job creation in the country.

The peace and security of Mali is closely linked with that of the region. The Security Council's continued support to the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force remains vital. We are pleased to note that the Joint Force achieved initial operational capability in October and has conducted its first operation — in the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, from 27 October to 11 November 2017.

Finally, we welcome the renewed commitment by the Malian parties to the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement and the understanding they have reached on the revised timeline for the implementation of the outstanding provisions by the end of March. It is absolutely essential that the parties abide by their commitment to respect the timelines. As agreed by the Council, action must be taken with regard to those who are found to be obstructing the timely, full and effectively implementation of the Agreement. We hope that the Council will send a unified message to the Malian parties calling on them to fulfil their obligations under the Peace Agreement and accelerate its implementation.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to welcome to New York and to the Security Council His Excellency Mr. Tiéman Hubert Coulibaly, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Mali. His presence among us today attests to the importance that His Excellency President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and his Government accord to the support of the Security Council and the international community to achieve the goals of stabilizing and normalizing the situation in the country. We ask Minister Coulibaly that he accept our sincerest congratulations on his recent appointment at the healm of Malian diplomacy.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea thanks the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, for presenting to us the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/1105) on the current situation in the Republic of Mali in a detailed and clear manner — as is his custom. Today's briefing is taking place 12 days following the briefing (see S/PV.8156) by Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel. Both that briefing, in which Mali was referenced as part of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), and today's on Mali specifically, are cause for serious concern. We therefore call on all political stakeholders in Mali to continue to capitalize on efforts by the members of the Security Council, including the visit to the region in late 2017, as well as the facilitation roles of Algeria and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

The Agreement Monitoring Committee designated the Carter Center as an independent observer responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. In resolution 2391 (2017), adopted on 8 December 2017, the Security Council renewed its urgent call on the parties to take concrete actions in connection with the operationalization of interim authorities in northern Mali, the establishment of the Operational Coordination Mechanism in Kidal and Timbuktu, and to carry out the launching of the cantonment, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, while also ensuring women's participation.

Meanwhile, as we observe the lack of significant progress with great concern in implementing the Agreement, terrorist groups continue their ferocious attacks against MINUSMA and the French and Malian forces in the central, southern and northern parts of Mali. As a consequence of those attacks, almost 100 members of MINUSMA have lost their lives since 2013. Given the situation, our delegation believes that

all measures needed to strengthen MINUSMA must be taken so that it can fulfil its mandate effectively, while also improving safety and security for its personnel.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea calls on all the parties concerned and those signatory to the Agreement, which was established two and a half years ago, to make the effort necessary for its implementation in a spirit of trust and with a shared vision of restoring peace and security in Mali, as a prerequisite for facing the challenges that the country will encounter in 2018, namely, ensuring that progress is made in a critical presidential election cycle scheduled for July and in legislative elections scheduled for November, for which a common political strategy will be needed, during which the international community will have to provide the necessary support for the Government of Mali to achieve that goal.

In that regard, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea commends the work of the International Organization of La Francophonie, which identified needs concerning the elections with a view towards providing all the necessary support, for which it dispatched the former Prime Minister of Djibouti, Mr. Dileita Mohamed Dileita, to Mali in November 2017 so that he could define those areas for which La Francophonie could provide support. We encourage La Francophonie to pursue its work and raise awareness of other partners so that they will join those efforts to ensure the support needed for the holding of planned elections throughout this year.

Notwithstanding the efforts aimed at supporting our Malian partners, I reiterate how important it is that the political will of all political actors prevail in putting Mali first and implementing the Peace Agreement, as well as taking advantage of all the support extended to the country, including in combating terrorist groups, establishing security throughout the country and holding successful elections, which will begin a new political chapter in the political life of Mali. MINUSMA will play a key role during that new decisive phase in order to ensure its successful completion.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands) (*spoke in French*): First of all, allow me to thank the Under-Secretary-General for his briefing. I also join colleagues in warmly welcoming the new Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali, His Excellency Mr. Coulibaly. The leadership of Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Annadif are truly worthy of admiration, as are the dedication and perseverance of the Mission personnel, in the complex environment of Mali. I also pay tribute to all those who have paid the ultimate price in their efforts to establish peace in Mali, including the brave soldiers from the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands has been involved in Mali for a long time. We are, and will remain, committed to Mali. As needed, we will contribute development assistance, diplomacy and our contribution to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

According to a Malian proverb, all those who paddle in the same boat have the same goal. More than ever before, for the international community, it is essential that all stakeholders be motivated by a common goal: peace in Mali. The year 2018 will be pivotal for Mali. Elections will be an important test in renewing the legitimacy of Mali's leaders. I would like to make three points: on the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) and on good governance.

First, concerning the peace process, swift progress in the inclusive implementation of the Peace Agreement is urgently needed. The timeline adopted last week was welcome progress, and we must adhere to it during the next two months. The Netherlands welcomes the support and mediation provided by the international community, the European Union and, especially, MINUSMA, thanks to which we have been able to move forward. Such international support remains crucial. Furthermore, the appointment of the independent observer and the Security Council's sanctions regime pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017) are vital components for achieving tangible results in 2018. We must not hesitate to use the tools provided by the sanctions regime when they are needed to promote progress.

Secondly, concerning the G-5 Joint Force and the capacity of MINUSMA, in a short time, the central part of Mali has become a hotbed of terrorism, intercommunal violence, illegal migration and organized crime, which seriously threaten the stability of Mali, the broader Sahel region and even Europe. The link between terrorism and transnational organized crime is toxic in its effect. It is for that reason that resolution 2364 (2017) quite rightly calls upon Member States to combat illicit activities, such as drug trafficking, trafficking in

migrants and trafficking in persons. Such challenges deserve the Council's full attention. The Netherlands therefore welcomes the establishment of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel. However, it is important to ensure the rapid and sustainable implementation of a sound regulatory framework in order to prevent the occurrence of all human rights violations. If we fail to guarantee respect for human rights and human dignity, including with regard to detention and judicial proceedings, we will raise a new generation of terrorists, instead of eliminating them.

The crisis in central Mali exerts greater pressure on the capabilities of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). To date, it remains the peacekeeping mission with the highest number of victims among Blue Helmets, which only serves to underscore the crucial importance of high-quality equipment and well-trained troops.

Based on our experience in Mali, the Netherlands has learned the importance of a well-trained troop contingent, quality equipment and operations that are conducted with reliable information. We would like to underscore in particular the importance of using innovative force-generation methods, such as rotation plans. We call upon the Secretariat to continue efforts to ensure the availability and sustainability of equipment, which is vital for the Mission's effectiveness. We call upon Member States to provide capacity to MINUSMA. During our presidency of the Security Council in two months' time, the modernization of peacekeeping operations will be the subject of our open debate on 28 March.

Thirdly, the coming year will be crucial as it pertains to good governance. In that regard, Bamako will play the most important role in providing sound leadership that will allow for inclusive and transparent dialogue ahead of elections. It is also important that women and young people be fully involved in the implementation of the Agreement. We commend the support provided by MINUSMA for the holding of legitimate elections. In order to enhance accountability and reconciliation, it is essential that the Malian Government commit to addressing human rights abuses and that it be supported in that endeavour. The Malian parties must commit to implementing urgent reforms, such as decentralization and security sector reform, that address the root causes of the crisis. We must prove to the Malian people that there are peace dividends to be reaped.

In conclusion, Mali and its people are faced with myriad challenges. MINUSMA must therefore work simultaneously at various levels. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is fully committed to Mali, peace, justice and development. Nonetheless, it is only with the full commitment of parties in Mali and of the international community that we will be able to build sustainable peace in Mali. The Kingdom of the Netherlands will remain the Council's partner in that endeavour.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his briefing. I would like to welcome Foreign Minister Coulibaly and, on behalf of the United States, congratulate him on his re-appointment. We look forward to working closely with him.

As Ambassador Haley has said, it is our priority to see enduring peace and security for all of Mali's citizens, as well as stability in the region. The upcoming local and presidential elections should not prevent or delay the Government and signatory parties from pursuing the implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. We believe the Peace Agreement remains Mali's best hope of building a future stable enough to support peaceful political transition. The United States takes positive yet cautious note of the September commitments reached by signatory parties to not return to the battlefield. We are encouraged by the absence of ceasefire violations and call upon all signatory parties to take advantage of the momentum.

However, we are disappointed by the lack of substantive progress on major elements of the Peace Agreement. Interim authorities may be operational but we have yet to see the fruits of effective governance in the regions. Mixed patrols took place in Gao but do not provide regular security back-up there. The continuing standoff with regard to the criteria and numbers of combatants to be submitted for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration reflect a serious lack of trust among parties and suggest a need for additional confidence-building measures.

In a country fraught with a growing regional threat of violent extremism and transnational organized crime, parties must adopt a renewed sense of urgency to make progress together on key security provisions of the Agreement. Mali's collective security must be arrived at collectively, with input and collaboration among all parties. The Peace Agreement is the signed road map for the parties to get there and the

Agreement's deliberative bodies provide the forums for debate on issues related to security and much more. Unilateral endeavours outside those forums can lead to misunderstanding and mistrust.

The parties' most recent timeline for progress agreed to earlier this month, in particular on the security provisions of the Agreement over the next few weeks and months, is a positive sign. However, if there is still no progress by the Council's next quarterly meeting, we should be prepared to consider action through the sanctions regime we unanimously adopted last September.

Unfortunately, we must also take note of the increased frequency, magnitude and lethality of attacks on both United Nations and Malian targets, which rose by one third as compared to the previous reporting period. That unacceptable number of troop deaths demands that we take a long, hard look at the current configuration of the United Nations in Mali.

We hope the Secretary-General's strategic review, in tandem with the Council's requests and resolution 2364 (2017) for a strategic prioritization plan for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), will deliver recommendations ahead of the Mission's renewal that will bolster mission security, elevate its most crucial tasks and increase its operational effectiveness. The Mission's ongoing efforts to implement recent recommendations to improve security, which are crucial in the light of MINUSMA's unacceptably high casualty rate, will help in that effort. However, MINUSMA's chronic shortage of forces and resources remains a matter of concern.

We must find an enduring solution for the most critical capability gaps, such as those related to combat convoy battalions, helicopters and armoured personnel carriers. In the most dangerous of peacekeeping missions, the United Nations, troop- and police-contributing countries and all Member States must work together to find a sustainable solution that will save peacekeepers' lives and bring peace closer in Mali. The United States applauds the efforts of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) in establishing its Joint Force. We are also pleased to hear of the progress of the United Nations in the development of the technical agreement. Pledges already made and those to be made at the upcoming 23 February donors' conference in Brussels will be critical to reimbursing MINUSMA's support through the Agreement. We would like to reiterate the Council's appeal in resolution 2391 (2017) that the technical agreement be a temporary measure to bring about the G-5 Sahel's self-sufficiency and not adversely impact MINUSMA's operations and personnel.

The United States pledge of $60 million specifically for the operationalization of the Joint Force will continue through its robust bilateral security assistance for the G-5 Sahel States, which totalled $1 billion in the past five years. We also applaud the efforts of the United Nations and the G-5 Sahel towards the development of a human rights compliance framework as a key component in respecting human rights and avoiding alienating local communities in the battle against the violence and recruitment of violent extremists.

The United States believes that even in a challenging electoral year, with the continued regional threat of terrorism, the parties to Mali's Peace Agreement, along with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and its partners, can work together to achieve concrete progress in the coming weeks and months. That progress, or the lack thereof, will be of paramount interest to the United States and the Security Council. For the people of Mali, and for Mali's friends in the region and beyond, the stakes are too high to delay progress any longer.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): I too would like to thank the Secretary-General, for his comprehensive report on the situation in Mali (S/2017/1105), and Mr. Lacroix, for so clearly setting out the report's findings during his briefing. I would also like to welcome Foreign Minister Coulibaly to the Council today.

Let me start by echoing the words of my Ethiopian colleague and welcoming the absence of violence between the signatory parties in Mali during this reporting period. Such conditions represent the best chance for the successful implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. We commend all the parties for their continued commitment to a definitive cessation of hostilities and urge them to remain committed.

The United Kingdom strongly supports the Agreement and the ongoing dialogue between the parties. We welcome the adoption of a revised timetable at the meeting of the Agreement Monitoring Committee last week. We strongly encourage all parties to reaffirm their commitment to the Agreement and to work together to implement the outstanding actions, as outlined by

them in the latest timetable, as soon as possible. It has now been more than two and a half years since the Agreement was signed. Like many other Council members, we are frustrated by the lack of meaningful substantive progress made in implementing it, and we urge all parties to speed that up. The Malian people's patience is not infinite and it is incumbent on all parties to deliver in good faith on the commitments they made in the Agreement. We welcome the appointment and participation of the Carter Center as an independent observer on the Agreement Monitoring Committee and hope it will lead to greater accountability for the delays in implementation. We will work with the international community to identify those who seek to block or prevent full implementation of the Peace Agreement, which now constitutes a basis for sanctions designations.

Elections are crucial to delivering on the promise of decentralization in Mali and are central to the Peace Agreement. It is disappointing that the local elections have been delayed, and it will be crucial to ensure that credible and fair local, presidential and parliamentary elections are delivered in 2018.

While we recognize that the best route to long-term stability in Mali is through implementation of the Peace Agreement, the security situation today remains poor and stabilizing the region is urgent. The United Kingdom is taking action in three ways to contribute to that. First, as our Prime Minister announced last week, we will be deploying three British Chinook helicopters to the Sahel and we will continue the support we offer through our heavy-lift transport aircraft, increasing the ability of French troops to manoeuvre efficiently in their battle against extremists. Secondly, the United Kingdom will provide an additional $17 million in aid to the region, including lifesaving humanitarian support for the hundreds of thousands of people affected by epidemics, natural disasters and conflict. Thirdly, we will continue to support the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and its mandate to support the implementation of the Peace Agreement, including the redeployment of reformed and reconstituted Malian defence and security forces and the protection of civilians.

We look forward to the upcoming strategic review of MINUSMA, which will be crucial to establishing the future direction of peacekeeping support to Mali. We also reiterate our support for the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) and its objectives of tackling terrorism, organized crime, people-smuggling and human trafficking in the region. We welcome the support of the international community in pledging funding for that initiative. We recognize the importance of MINUSMA's technical and logistical support to the G-5 Joint Force in helping it get up to full capacity, and we encourage the swift implementation of a technical agreement to enable this. We also reiterate the calls of the Security Council for the implementation of a robust human rights compliance framework by the G-5 Sahel Joint Force. We recall, however, that the Joint Force was not created solely as a military force and that there is no exclusive military solution to insecurity in the cross-border regions. G-5 cooperation with MINUSMA on development and humanitarian efforts will be crucial.

In conclusion, we welcome the positive steps made since the last Council meeting on this subject (see S/PV.8062), including the reduction in violence, but now is the time to see meaningful progress and action to implement the Peace Agreement. That is the only way to achieve lasting peace and security in Mali and the region.

Mr. Iliichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix for his detailed briefing, and we welcome the participation in today's meeting of Mr. Tiéman Coulibaly, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mali.

We noted the signing on 20 September by the parties in Mali of a memorandum on a cessation of hostilities and the subsequent halt to the fighting between the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad and the Platform coalition of armed groups. We also took positive note of the meeting held in Anéfis in October on intercommunal reconciliation among the Malian parties. Nor should we omit to mention the completed establishment of all the interim administrations for all five of the country's northern regions. We hope that Mali's decision to postpone the municipal and regional elections until April, taken with the active mediation of Mr. Mahamat Saleh Annadif, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, will enable a more inclusive political process.

Despite those positives, we are concerned about the delays in implementing the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, including the processes of cantonment and security-sector reform. We welcome the agreements reached by the Malian parties just last

week on renewing the timetable for implementing the Algiers Agreement. Now they must be implemented.

Unfortunately, the security situation is now deteriorating, not because of the Malian parties but rather as a result of an increase in terrorist activity. We are worried about the geographical expansion of their activity, as well as the growing losses among Malian security forces and Blue Helmets. In that regard, we welcome the commitment of the countries of the region to establishing the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel, and we participated in coming up with a balanced Security Council resolution to support them (S/2017/2391). However, we share the Secretariat's view that it will be impossible to stabilize the region without full implementation of the Agreement by Mali's stakeholders. We should never forget that the collapse of the security situation in the Sahel followed the 2011 foreign intervention in Libya that led to the de facto dismantling of the Libyan State.

We welcome the strengthening of the military and police components of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). We call on the Secretariat to take additional measures to provide peacekeepers with armoured personnel carriers and attack and transport helicopters, as well as to improve the Blue Helmets' security. We expect the Mission to finally reach full operational readiness in 2018. Taking into account the Malian Government's position, we helped to adopt resolution 2364 (2017), which defined the specific tasks of MINUSMA in assisting the country's security forces. It is important to note that a memorandum on this specific issue was signed in November.

Taking the wishes of Bamako into consideration, Russia also supported the adoption of resolution 2374 (2017), which imposed a sanctions regime on individuals who sabotage the implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. We share the desire of the Malians to speed up the stabilization of the northern regions. At the same time, we would like to warn once again that using the threat of sanctions has its own collateral effects. We hope that that step of the Security Council does not lead to the hostility from the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad and the Platform coalition of armed groups and increased mistrust among the Malian parties. We also hope that the established sanctions mechanisms will be used only as intended, namely, to contribute to the political process and the stabilization of the country.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Kazakhstan.

We join others in expressing appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his comprehensive briefing and we welcome the presence of Mr. Tiéman Hubert Coulibaly, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mali, in the Chamber. We endorse the Secretary-General's quarterly report (S/2017/1105), and wish to follow up with some observations.

The key step is to prioritize the full and inclusive implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. We encourage all parties to comply with the recently revised timeline for implementing the remaining provisions of the Agreement.

We believe that the assistance of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and of the international community is crucial to ensure the transparent, fair and peaceful conduct of the 2018 elections, as they, in turn, will facilitate realizing the Agreement.

Likewise, it is necessary to establish, through reform, the foundations for a stable rule of law, reinforced by independent and accountable judicial and security institutions. We also appreciate the United Nations efforts to ensure accountability and to fight impunity by the creation of the International Commission of Inquiry. The genuine inclusion of women in the peace process and in decision-making is another important measure for enduring stability.

Kazakhstan is alarmed by the security and humanitarian situations, which have significantly deteriorated, and calls on international partners and donors to provide the pledged humanitarian aid. We believe that the upcoming strategic review of MINUSMA will contribute to enhancing the Mission's capabilities and to improving the security situation.

We are pleased to note the strengthened cooperation among MINUSMA, the African Union, the European Union and the Sahel countries in combating terrorism and other cross-border threats, and commend international partners for mobilizing financial support for the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel.

Finally, to address the root causes of conflict in Mali, military operations must go hand in hand with well-integrated and coordinated development efforts, reinforced by sustainable funding. In that regard, we

fully support the projects of the Peacebuilding Fund, as well as the Government's multidimensional strategy for the central regions, and call for the finalizing of the development agenda for the northern regions.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Mali.

Mr. Coulibaly (Mali) (*spoke in French*): Allow me, first of all, to express the satisfaction of the delegation of Mali in seeing, your country, Mr. President — Kazkahstan — preside over the Security Council for this month of January. At the same time, I would like to congratulate Japan on its outstanding conduct of the Council's work during the past month.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, for his tireless efforts to implement the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali and for the operationalization of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel — two guarantees for lasting stability throughout the region.

I would like to express our warm congratulations to the newly elected members of the Council, namely, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Kuwait, Peru and Poland, and assure them of our full and complete cooperation for the success of their work in the service of peace. I would also like to express our deep gratitude to the delegations of Egypt, Japan, Senegal, Ukraine and Uruguay for their excellent contribution in the pursuit of solutions to the emerging challenges related to, inter alia, environmental degradation, irregular migration, trafficking of all kinds, and the spread of terrorism and violent extremism, as well as the repeated asymmetric attacks targeting United Nations peacekeeping forces in the fulfilment of their mandates.

In the same vein, I would like to congratulate Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his excellent presentation of the report under consideration (S/2017/1105).

The Government of Mali takes note of the report of the Secretary-General and is pleased with the quality of the cooperation between the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the Government of the Republic of Mali. That is demonstrated by the existence of mechanisms between the two parties to evaluate the criteria for monitoring the implementation of the Agreement, as well as in the area of human rights.

The Government of Mali fully supports the Secretary-General's assessment that undeniable progress has been made at the political and institutional levels and with regard to defence, security, justice and economic development issues, as well as the provision of basic social services.

We see that progress as a source of encouragement for the Malian parties and for all our partners, whose assistance and multifaceted support are particularly appreciated. Without needing to recall the long list of those developments, which reflect the will and commitment of the Government of Mali, under the authority of the Head of State, I would simply like to underscore that such progress contributes to the gradual restoration of peace and security in our country.

However, time is in short supply. I would like to reaffirm the determination of the President of the Republic of Mali to make every effort to accelerate the implementation of the Agreement, for we remain deeply convinced that there is no alternative to that peaceful way for the lasting settlement of the complex crisis in Mali. With regard to the prospects for 2018 in connection with the implementation of the Agreement, the Government of Mali will continue its efforts to maintain the climate of increasing trust between the signatory parties and to initiate a draft law on national agreement in order to take up the proposals of the national conference of understanding.

Anxious to meet the deep aspirations of all our people, the Head of State has assigned the new Government team the following four priorities: completion of the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation; containment of the increasing insecurity in the centre of the country; meeting social demands by accelerating the implementation of the presidential programme on urgent social needs; and the organization of transparent, credible and peaceful elections. As the Security Council can see, the implementation of the Agreement is at the top of the President's priorities.

The initiative of the Head of State to launch the adoption process for the law on national understanding, in line with implementing the charter for peace, unity and national reconciliation issued as the outcome of the national conference of understanding, is also part of that

dynamic. That law seeks to rebuild the social fabric and national unity and to strengthen reconciliation among Malians by means of the exemption from prosecution of all those involved in armed rebellion but who have no blood on their hands; measures to restore calm after accelerating the trials under way and granting reparations to recognized victims; and a reintegration programme for all those who lay down their arms and publically and frankly commit to renouncing violence. In that way, the Government will rapidly initiate a draft law on national understanding that will reflect those proposals.

It is because time is in short supply that, in addition to that bold initiative of the President, the Government will also seek to expedite the implementation of political and institutional reforms, of the cantonment and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, security sector reform, as well as the return of refugees and displaced persons.

I also mention the holding, on 15 and 16 January, of the twenty-third session of the Agreement Monitoring Committee in Mali, which welcomed and validated the timeline of priority actions selected by the Malian parties. The timeline provides a road map for implementing key provisions of the Agreement that are conducive to stabilizing the country and holding forthcoming elections. The Committee urged the Malian parties to respect the commitments made and encouraged the international community to provide support in that regard.

In order to ensure greater efficiency in the dialogue among the parties to the Agreement, the Malian parties have agreed to the future participation of MINUSMA and the lead partner of the international mediation at the meetings of the inter-Malian discussion mechanism as observers. All the details of this timeline are annexed to the updated memorandum on the actions undertaken by the Government and were distributed as Security Council documents.

One of the major challenges to the stabilization of our country lies in meeting the political deadlines to come. The sovereign decision of the Government of Mali to postpone the elections, initially scheduled for December 2017, to 2018 is due to the concern for inclusiveness and openness of the top Malian authorities with a view to creating an environment that is most conducive to holding those elections. I take this opportunity to reiterate the commitment of the Government of Mali to organizing free, credible and transparent elections within the constitutional deadlines and throughout the national territory — taking into account the law on gender so as to ensure the representativeness of women in elected positions.

In addition, the Government is making every effort to implement the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants. In that connection, it should be recalled that, out of the $50 million earmarked for the implementation of the programme, the Government of Mali, despite its limited resources, financed $10 million of its own funds to supplement the $15 million dollars provided by the World Bank, which I commend. I hope that, with the support of other partners, the gap will soon be bridged.

In the same vein, I am pleased to report that the National Security Sector Reform Council has already prepared a road map for the finalization of the national security sector reform strategy. In that connection, at the latest meeting of the Agreement Monitoring Committee both signatory parties undertook to finalize, before 2 February, the consensual criteria and quotas for the integration of ex-combatants within the national army.

In addition to improving security conditions in the northern regions of the country, the Government attaches particular importance to the situation in the central regions of Mali, particularly the regions of Mopti and Ségou. Repeated attacks on civilians and State officials undermine efforts to restore State authority over the territory and hinder the provision by the State of basic social services to our fellow citizens in those regions.

This is a major challenge that the Government intends to address through the rapid acceleration of the effective operationalization of the integrated security plan for the central regions, in order to guarantee the peace of mind that would enable the effective return of the administration to that part of the country, thereby enabling children to go to school in peace and the people to go about their business normally. Likewise, the Government will immediately organize an inclusive political dialogue on the security situation in the centre of the country.

With regard to the human rights situation referred to in the report of the Secretary-General under consideration, I note that the establishment of a ministry fully dedicated to human rights in successive Governments illustrates the unwavering political will

of Malian authorities for the promotion and protection of human rights. Despite the difficult situation in Mali, the Government has committed itself to that task. I can report to the Council that the Minister of Justice has already given instructions to the judicial authorities in affected jurisdictions to open investigations and inquiries into allegations of human rights violations set out in the report, including cases of forced disappearances, arrests and arbitrary detentions. Those efforts are possible thanks to the dynamic cooperation of the Ministries of Justice and Human Rights with the Human Rights Division of MINUSMA.

As for the humanitarian situation, it should be noted that the Government of Mali is resolutely committed to meeting the challenges related to the return of displaced persons and refugees in optimal conditions; providing access for people affected by the crisis to basic social services, including education, health, nutrition, water, hygiene and sanitation; and improving the livelihoods and resilience of the people. Moreover, the Lycée de Kidal was reopened for the school year 2017-2018 and the State effectively returned in all the regional capitals of the North and the main towns in the region.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations and to all other humanitarian actors operating in Mali, which continue to provide assistance to refugees, displaced persons and those left behind in crisis-affected areas.

With regard to MINUSMA-related security, the Government of Mali renews its request to strengthen the operational capabilities of the United Nations Mission in Mali so as to allow it to fully discharge its mandate. For my part, I welcome the signing, on 8 November 2017, of the memorandum of understanding between MINUSMA and the Government of Mali on the Mission's support for the Malian armed forces. We call for the diligent implementation of the memorandum, with a view to creating the conditions for the restoration of State authority throughout the national territory, in particular by allowing the return of the Administration and the defence and security forces to all northern regions, including Kidal.

At the regional level, Mali welcomes the progress made in the process of operationalizing the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel. I welcome the support of the Council and of all bilateral and multilateral partners for the Force.

While the Malian presidency will end in the coming weeks, Mali remains fully committed to the security and development goals of the Organization. We must hasten the signing of the technical agreement that we discussed here this morning and pursue the mobilization efforts of all bilateral and multilateral partners for this security project that is critical for the Group of Five for the Sahel countries and, above all, enhances all efforts made since the beginning of the Malian crisis — especially in the context of the spread of the terrorist threat.

In conclusion, I reiterate the thanks and gratitude of Mali and its President to the Secretary-General, his Special Representative in Mali and all MINUSMA personnel, as well as to the troop-contributing countries, the French force Barkhane, the European training mission and the members of the Agreement Monitoring Committee, led by Algeria, for their tireless support for the peace and stabilization process in our country.

The Government of Mali strongly condemns all cowardly and barbaric attacks on national and international forces and on civilians. I reiterate our condolences to the families of all victims — civilian and military, foreign and Malian — who have fallen in the fight against terrorism on the field of honour in Mali and elsewhere.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8164

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8164th meeting
Tuesday, 23 January 2018, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Umarov	(Kazakhstan)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Tenya
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I should like at the outset to apologize to the members of the Security Council and the Secretariat for the fact that I ruined their siesta today.

We have requested the convening of an open meeting of the Security Council because the issue that we intend to raise is far too important for the discussion to be held in closed consultations. We have nothing to hide. When we discussed Syria in consultations yesterday, many touched on the importance of establishing a new structure to investigate instances of chemical-weapons use in Syria to supplement the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), which fully discredited itself. We have never forgotten this issue, and we have consistently recalled in meetings our readiness to continue consultations on this matter, as noted by Minister Lavrov to the Secretary-General last week. Yesterday, however, we were unable to rise to that call. Today, upon instruction from our capital, it is my honour to report the following.

Russia has consistently stressed the importance of taking the most serious approach to the problem of the manufacture and use of chemical weapons. We are troubled by manifestations of chemical-weapons terrorism in the Middle East, which are not limited to Syrian territory. Unfortunately, the JIM, which no longer exists, caused the collapse of the investigation, which from a scientific and technical perspective was an utter failure and became an instrument for political manipulation. Members of the international community and the Security Council were well aware of the Russian specialists' scrupulous analysis of the conclusions of the JIM.

In an attempt to interpret certain elements of the Russian approach, during consultations on 9 January the United States delegation circulated the relevant document. However, at no point in the document was there even an attempt to approach the matter from a professional standpoint. The so-called refutations of our position do not stand up to any criticism. I invite Council members to familiarize themselves with the material supporting our position in the response that we circulated yesterday as an official Security Council document. Today, incidentally, senior representatives of the United States Department of State made further unfounded accusations alleging that Russia is hindering international verification of the facts of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We have already responded to that, and anyone who wants to can read Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov's comments on the issue. No one has called more than we have for a further investigation — a professional one rather than a simulacrum — into the incidents involving the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and at the moment we are still trying to get the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to send its specialists to Syria to see for themselves the stockpiles of chemical weapons left by militants in liberated areas that the Syrian Government has discovered.

By the way, during yesterday's consultations, following the reports of various recent incidents involving the use of toxic substances in Syria, which have yet to be verified, the representatives of the United States and the United Kingdom — without a second's pause or any evidence, let alone an investigation — hastened to declare them the work of what they refer to as the Syrian "regime". Now they are trying to drag Russia into it too. Secretary of State Tillerson brought this up in Paris today at the meeting of the so-called international partnership of States against impunity for the use of chemical weapons, basing his argument on an incident that allegedly occurred yesterday in eastern Ghouta. However, his statement was devoted almost exclusively to Russia. By the way, does nobody find it strange that this alleged incident, whose genuineness has yet to be confirmed — as does the identity of its perpetrators, if it is genuine — coincided very conveniently with the meeting in Paris and the forthcoming Syrian national dialogue conference in Sochi? An amazing coincidence.

Some States are persisting in their attempts to push through an anti-Damascus verdict at the OPCW at all costs, and thereby undermining that respected organization's authority. Others are seeking to scrape together a narrow alliance of anti-impunity-ites through non-legitimate formats.

In November of last year, Russia, working with others of like mind, put together draft resolution

S/2017/968, which would have ensured that the JIM's activities conformed to the the high international standards of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which guarantee a genuinely impartial and professional investigation. The initiative was blocked by a number of delegations at the time. We want to rise above those differences and propose creating a new international investigative body that could establish the facts that the Security Council needs in order to identify those who used toxic substances as weapons, based on irreproachable, irrefutable information from transparent, credible sources. It must be professional and non-politicized. We have prepared a draft of such a resolution and ask that the Secretariat circulate it. We hope that Council members will study our initiative with their capitals as soon as possible. We are ready for substantive consultations.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): Russia has convened us with almost no notice, and then put forth a proposal that it hopes will distract from the new French initiative to hold accountable those who use chemical weapons. Today, Russia is again doing what it does best with regard to chemical weapons. It is running from the facts. It has the audacity to lecture the Security Council about how to stop the use of chemical weapons. I know that I have said this before, but it is worth repeating. In the past year, Russia exercised the right to veto three times to kill the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) in Syria. All by itself, Russia killed the Mechanism, which we had specifically tasked with identifying those responsible for using chemical weapons in Syria. Russia should look in the mirror before bringing us into the Security Council to talk about chemical weapons.

Earlier this week, we received yet another report that the Al-Assad regime had used chlorine gas on its own people. Dozens of civilians had to be treated for suffocation. Syrian children were literally gasping for breath as chlorine gas surrounded them. Of course, it is no coincidence that this week's chlorine-gas attack reportedly happened in the exact place that the Al-Assad regime is trying to take over militarily. We know that it resorts to such brutal tactics when it wants to retake territory, without any regard for innocent civilians, and we know that Russia has looked the other way for years while its Syrian friends use those despicable weapons of war. Russia is complicit in the Al-Assad regime's atrocities. Will the representative of the Russian Federation say anything at all today about the suffering caused by Al-Assad's barbaric tactics? Will it hold Al-Assad to account? Of course not. It never does.

It is therefore fitting that Russia brought us here on the same day that a new initiative on accountability for chemical weapons has been introduced in Paris. Today, France launched an international partnership against impunity for chemical weapons. We strongly support that effort and commend France for its leadership. More than 25 like-minded countries have come together to share and preserve information on who has used chemical weapons and to make sure that the perpetrators will be held accountable. Make no mistake — the United States, together with the Council, will continue to pursue those who have used chemical weapons to ensure that they are held accountable for their atrocities. Russia says that it has concerns about this French initiative to share evidence of the use of chemical weapons. That is no surprise. Russia opposed the Joint Investigative Mechanism because it collected facts about who used chemical weapons in Syria. Now Russia is questioning the French effort to collect facts on who used chemical weapons. What can we conclude?

To put it simply, when Russia does not like the facts, it tries to distract the conversation. That is because the facts come back over and over again to the truth that Russia wants to hide, which is that the Al-Assad regime continues to use chemical weapons against its own people. Today, Russia once again threw around many different accusations. Again, that is not surprising. Russia often puts out misleading and unfounded claims to confuse the conversation about chemical weapons. In fact, this happens so often that we recently wrote to the Security Council with a detailed assessment of Russia's misleading claims. The letter is public and available for anyone to see. We encourage everyone to take a look at it for themselves.

Here is the bottom line. The Security Council gave the Joint Investigative Mechanism a mandate to tell us who used chemical weapons in Syria. When investigators found the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham to be responsible, Russia was fine. When the investigators found that the Al-Assad regime had used them, Russia tried to find any excuse to poke holes in the investigation and threw up smoke to question the findings. But hat is not how independent investigations work. You do not get to question the findings when they do not go your way. We are therefore not going to accept any Russian proposal that undermines our

ability to get to the truth or that politicizes what must be an independent and impartial investigation. If the Russians want to work in good faith towards that goal, we are ready to re-establish the JIM, with its original, independent and impartial mandate, right now. But anything less is unacceptable.

To be crystal clear: the United States supports accountability for anyone who uses chemical weapons. We agree with Russia that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham must be held accountable for its use of such weapons, as the Joint Investigative Mechanism has found. But the difference between the United States and Russia is that we believe that no one should be let off the hook. Chemical weapons must never be used. Russia can continue to talk for as long as it wants about chemical weapons. It can bring it up in the Security Council Chamber as often as it wants. We welcome the debate. The United States and the international community will not be fooled. We remain steadfast in pursuing accountability for those who use chemical weapons. We stand strong in doing all we can to preserve the norm against their use. We remain forever committed to preserving the truth about what the Al-Assad regime has done in Syria and, sadly, what it will likely continue to do.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): We meet today after receiving news about another chemical attack in Syria — this time in Douma — which resulted in more than 20 victims, including women and children. Furthermore, the attack was penetrated in a de-escalation zone. We are closely following all available information. We expect that the international investigative mechanism in place — in particular the Fact-finding Mission — will shed light on the attack.

As we commemorate the one hundredth anniversary this year of the end of the First World War, during which chemical weapons produced on an industrial scale were used for the first time in history, repeated chemical-weapon attacks in Syria are an affront to the human conscience and a violation of the most fundamental norms of international law. The facts prove that the scourge continues to exist. Last year in Syria, on 4 April, more than 80 people, including women and children, were killed by a powerful nerve agent. Four years prior, 2,000 Syrian civilians were gassed in Ghouta with sarin gas. The use of chemical weapons was confirmed by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

The OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) clearly determined that the Syrian regime and Da'esh were responsible for those attacks. France itself independently confirmed that the Syrian regime was responsible for the attack perpetrated on 4 April. Since 2013, investigations have revealed more than 100 allegations of the use of chemical weapons, primarily in Syria but also in Iraq and Malaysia. Chlorine gas, sarin, mustard gas and VX — all deadly nerve agents — have returned to the forefront of the international arena a century after the horrors of the First World War. Gruesome images of the victims of such weapons of terror, which we thought we had long ago left behind, have also resurfaced. We cannot allow the use of such loathsome weapons to become commonplace. They destabilize entire regions and threaten everyone's security. They increase the risk of chemical terrorism, which we all fear. They also weaken the regime against chemical weapons as well as the entire non-proliferation regime. They undermine international law and call into question the outcome of international forums that have been held for decades.

That is why we must take action. We owe it to history; it is a responsibility we must shoulder together. Those of us who claim to be committed to the non-proliferation regime and helped to build it should bear that in mind. Let us be clear: those who hamper our efforts to combat impunity endorse de facto impunity for the perpetrators of such chemical attacks. They prevent us from deterring and bringing to justice those who participated in chemical-weapon programmes and those Governments and entities that give the orders to carry out attacks. We therefore cannot turn a blind eye and allow them to continue — and all the more so, and I repeat this, given that the chemical-weapon non-proliferation regime is the most developed and successful of all international non-proliferation regimes. Allowing it to be weakened without taking action would be tantamount to accepting the erosion of the entire non-proliferation regime on weapons of mass destruction, which we built together, step by step, over decades and which now serves as the backbone of the international security architecture and one of multilateralism's main accomplishments.

France has therefore proposed the establishment of a new international partnership to combat impunity for the use of chemical weapons by anyone — State and non-State actors alike. That partnership was launched yesterday in Paris at a conference convened by the

French Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jean-Yves Le Drian, at which representatives of 24 States were in attendance to reiterate their willingness to work together to counter the threat. I should like to mention just a few of the partnership's ambitious commitments. They include the transfer and sharing of information, when possible, about the perpetrators of attacks; a commitment to impose national or international sanctions against entities and individuals concerned; assistance for building State capacity with regard to designations and sanctions; and the publication of a single, consolidated list of the names of individuals involved in attacks. Criminals who claim responsibility for developing and using such barbaric weapons must know that they will not go unpunished. Once again, this is about the future of the entire collective security system. One should not be able to violate the most basic norms without eventually facing the consequences.

Owing to obstruction on the part of certain countries, we were unable to renew the JIM's mandate at the end of last year. Yesterday's consultations on Syria confirmed that an overwhelming majority of the members of the Security Council do not agree with the current impasse. In that regard, we take note of the proposal made today by Russia. We will consider it in the light of the principles I have just outlined.

The new partnership launched in Paris does not aim to replace international instruments and the investigative mechanism established by the United Nations and the OPCW. Instead, it seeks to complement and bolster that structure by making a new operational instrument available to the multilateral system and the international community. It will assist investigations and help the international justice system in its work. It is neither an anti-Syrian instrument nor an exclusive club of countries. All countries can join this pragmatic and open partnership by adhering to its statement of principles. Through the partnership, they will show their commitment to law, international stability, justice and security in order to end impunity for the perpetrators of chemical attacks and their accomplices. We must therefore work through the partnership to consolidate the regime prohibiting chemical weapons. The cornerstone of the partnership was laid in Paris and embodies our faith in effective and demanding multilateralism. In an effort to take immediate action, I can confirm that France has imposed asset-freezes on networks involved in the proliferation of chemical weapons in Syria.

In conclusion, I recall that there will be no justice or sustainable peace in Syria without putting an end to impunity. How can we continue to defend the regime and reiterate its willingness to speak in good faith and seek a political solution when that very same regime employs barbaric weapons against its own people? There has never been a larger gap between words and deeds. At the United Nations in both Vienna and Geneva, I said that we must work together to reach a political solution in Syria. Implementing an inclusive political solution as outlined in resolution 2254 (2015), which serves as our guidepost now more than ever, will depend upon a neutral environment in Syria guaranteed by the regime's clear commitment to credible constitutional change and democratic elections. It is the only way to permanently end the suffering of Syrians. We continue to believe that we can, and must, bring the Security Council together to proceed in that direction.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): When I heard today that Russia had called for an urgent meeting on the use of chemical weapons in Syria, I was glad that we could return to an issue on which the Council has a duty to ensure that those responsible are held to account. That duty is even more pressing today, because yet another heinous attack on civilians was reported yesterday to the Council by the Secretariat. In that attack, in Douma, in eastern Ghouta, at least 21 civilians were treated for symptoms consistent with exposure to chlorine. That followed another reported attack in eastern Ghouta on 13 January, affecting six people.

In 2016, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) found in three cases that the Syrian regime had used chlorine gas to attack civilians. Last year, it found that the regime had used sarin in Khan Shaykhun. Now, as the regime is escalating its attacks on eastern Ghouta in an attempt to force the besieged opposition to surrender, we remain deeply concerned about continuing reports of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. In all of this, we should not forget that it was the regime's 2013 attack on eastern Ghouta, using sarin, that led to the Council's adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), which had the clear, unanimously endorsed aim of disarming Syria's chemical-weapon programme.

Throughout that process, Russia has claimed to be acting as a leading Power, a guarantor. But when the Al-Assad regime deliberately ignored its obligation to stop using chemical weapons and continued to do so with careless regard for human life, Russia chose to

abuse its power of veto to protect that regime. Russia says that it supported the renewal of the JIM mandate and that it was the rest of us who killed it, because we could not agree with Russia's terms. Yet Russia's proposed draft resolution would have removed the JIM's ability to investigate the Al-Assad regime, which has been found responsible for multiple attacks. Russia has made it clear several times that it will not support a new investigative mechanism as long as it has the power to hold to account a State Member of the United Nations, and it seems, from a rapid reading of the latest text, that this proposal is another attempt to shift attention to non-State actors

The Russians have even claimed that Syria is a signatory in good standing to the Chemical Weapons Convention. It is not. It has not completed its declaration. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has repeatedly warned of inconsistencies, gaps and omissions. Russia has great influence over the Al-Assad regime. For the sake of the Syrian people and for preventing the future use of chemical weapons, we call on Russia to persuade its Syrian friends to get rid of their chemical weapons and comply fully with the Chemical Weapons Convention. By ending the JIM, Russia also stopped its investigations of chemical attacks by Da'esh. The investigators had found that those terrorists had carried out at least two such attacks. We condemn Da'esh unreservedly for its use of these vile weapons, which is yet another reason why we must defeat those terrorists once and for all.

The United Kingdom was proud to join the international partnership against impunity for the use of chemical weapons led by our French colleagues today in Paris. The use of chemical weapons is barbaric, illegal under international law and must stop. We must ensure that we can re-establish a mechanism to ensure accountability. We all know where the obstacle to that lies. In response, we will only redouble our efforts to pursue accountability for these crimes.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): The Kingdom of the Netherlands is deeply shocked by the ongoing attacks using chemical weapons in Syria. The Secretariat briefed the Council yesterday on yet another alleged chemical-weapon attack, the second this month. Two surface-to-surface projectiles targeted eastern Ghouta, releasing what is suspected to be chlorine. The attack resulted in injuring 21 people through exposure to chlorine, of whom eight were men, six women and seven children. Furthermore, there are shocking estimates of 130 chemical attacks between 2012 and 2017, with more than 60 pending allegations of chemical-weapon use in Syria still to be investigated by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and its Fact-finding Mission. The Netherlands condemns in the strongest terms the use of chemical weapons by any State or non-State actor. I would now like to make three points.

First, accountability for the use of chemical weapons in Syria is neither optional nor negotiable. Secondly, it is unacceptable that four years after Syria joined the Chemical Weapons Convention, its declaration is still unable to be verified as accurate and complete. Thirdly, the Netherlands will use its membership of the Security Council to bring accountability to the fore. We regret the dismantling of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM). We were convinced of the professionalism and independence of the JIM's work, and its results still stand. The Council should shoulder its responsibility in that regard. In particular, the countries on the Council with influence on Syria should use it with the Syrian regime to convince it to refrain from further chemical-weapon attacks, acknowledge its past use of such weapons and complete its chemical-weapon declaration.

As long as the Council remains deadlocked, our focus on accountability will not stop here. We will look for complementary measures so that impunity will not prevail. We therefore thank France for taking the initiative to establish an international partnership against impunity for the use of chemical weapons. The Netherlands participated in the meeting of the partnership that took place in Paris today. The Paris initiative aims to collect evidence of the use of chemical weapons anywhere in the world. It will enable States to take action to uphold the international norms against the use of chemical weapons. It represents a political commitment to increasing pressure on those responsible for the use of chemical weapons, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands is fully committed to that goal. Furthermore, the International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011; the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic; and national prosecution in third countries, as well as sanctions, remain instrumental for achieving accountability for the crimes committed

against the Syrian people. We must use all the tools available to us to achieve accountability.

In conclusion, the Netherlands remains convinced that a referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court in The Hague is by far the best option for achieving accountability for the extremely serious crimes that have taken place in Syria.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): Yesterday the Council members were briefed by Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman on yet another alleged chemical-weapon attack in Syria. Allegations of the use of such weapons continue to be reported. There are some 60 cases of the reported use of chemical weapons in Syria that are currently being examined by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and that its Fact-finding Missions continue to investigate and report, including a case of a sarin attack in Lataminah in March of last year.

I would like to reiterate once again that Sweden condemns the use of chemical weapons in the strongest terms. It is a serious violation of international law and its use in armed conflict amounts to a war crime. Bringing the perpetrators of such crimes to justice remains a high priority. There must be no impunity for those responsible. That is why we participated in the meeting of the international partnership against impunity for the use of chemical weapons held today in Paris. As a member of the Council and the OPCW Executive Council, Sweden attaches great importance to all international efforts to combat the use and proliferation of chemical weapons by State and non-State actors alike, anywhere in the world. We trust that the French initiative will complement and support our collective work in multilateral forums, as well as the existing multilateral mechanisms to achieve unity around those important goals. That also includes the Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic, which play an important role in collecting information.

It was highly regrettable that the Council was not able to agree on an extension of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. It is a critical to establish a similar new impartial and independent attributive mechanism now. The Council needs to come back together and speak with one voice. We need to be forward-looking and overcome our differences with a view to protecting the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime and ensuring accountability. That should be possible if everyone engages seriously, constructively and genuinely in good faith. We stand ready to engage in such efforts in order for the Council to fully shoulder its responsibilities.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): We are deeply concerned about the reported use of chemical weapons in eastern Ghouta, which is in clear violation of international law and deserves condemnation in the strongest possible terms. This alleged use of chemical weapons, as with other incidents, including in Talmenes, demonstrates the need to hold perpetrators accountable. There is no space for impunity in this regard.

We support taking all the necessary measures to fill the gap left by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, so as to ensure that no one goes unpunished for using chemical weapons, which cause unacceptable harm and suffering. Those responsible for chemical attacks must realize that they will be held accountable because their acts are an affront to all humankind and the basic rules of civilization.

We support the tireless work done by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. We are convinced that it is the responsibility of the Security Council to establish and maintain a suitable institution to investigate alleged cases of the use of chemical weapons.

Let me take this opportunity to thank France for today's hosting of a high-level meeting to launch a new initiative to protect the core values underpinning the credibility of the non-proliferation regime on chemical weapons established by the Chemical Weapons Convention. Poland joined that new partnership with the sole purpose of using all the tools at our disposal to end impunity for those responsible for chemical attacks and to promote and complement existing standards and mechanisms against the use of chemical weapons. We look forward to working on this issue in the Council in the months to come.

Mr. Tenya (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Security Council has the highly sensitive responsibility of contributing to the prevention of the use of chemical weapons, which entails identifying and prosecuting those responsible for atrocities such as the one perpetrated yesterday in Syria.

Peru participated in the meeting convened by France today to establish a partnership to combat impunity for the use of chemical weapons, at which a declaration of principles was adopted. The document sets out a series of measures aimed at ensuring that individuals and entities responsible for the use of chemical weapons are brought to justice. During that meeting, Peru's Ambassador to France referred in particular to paragraph 3 of the terms of reference, which had been circulated in advance, wherein it is expressly stated that the purpose of the initiative is not in any way meant to replace, reproduce or supersede international inquiry and investigation mechanisms that serve the same purpose. Our Ambassador also expressed his satisfaction with those words, insofar as Peru, as a member of the Security Council and a member of the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, encourages the necessary action to be taken by those competent bodies.

Peru condemns in the strongest possible terms the lack of accountability in the continuing incidents involving chemical weapons in Syria, for we believe it undermines international regimes on the matter and weakens peace efforts in the region.

Mr. Shen Bo (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China expresses its grave concern about the use of chemical weapons in Syria and extends its deepest sympathy to the Syrian people for their suffering.

China's position on chemical weapons has been clear and consistent. We firmly oppose the use of chemical weapons by any country, group or individual for any purpose and under any circumstances. The use of chemical weapons is unacceptable, whenever or wherever they are used. China supports a comprehensive, objective and fair investigation into such incidents in order to arrive at a conclusion that can stand the test of time and to shed light on the facts in order to bring the perpetrators to justice.

China welcomes the draft resolution circulated by the delegation of the Russian Federation that would establish a new investigative mechanism on Syrian chemical weapons. China appreciates the efforts made by Russia in the Security Council to continue to advance the work on the Syrian chemical weapons issue. China will seriously study the draft resolution and actively participate in consultations on it.

It is imperative to establish a new investigative mechanism to find out the truth and to deter further use of chemical weapons in Syria. We hope that Council members will participate in the consultations in a constructive manner and strive to reach consensus on the establishment of a new mechanism.

The Syrian chemical weapons issue is closely linked to a political settlement to the Syrian question, and it requires a comprehensive, balanced and integrated approach. China supports the role of the Security Council and of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons as the main channel for achieving an appropriate resolution to the Syrian chemical weapons issue. We hope that all the relevant parties will adopt a constructive attitude and seek appropriate solutions during consultations. We must maintain the unity of the Council and coordinate with the relevant parties in an effort to actively promote the political process in Syria.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia reiterates its strong, categorical condemnation of the use of chemical weapons and chemical substances as weapons as unjustifiable and criminal acts — wherever, whenever and by whomever they are committed. We believe that there can be no justification for the use of such weapons, regardless of the circumstances and of who uses them, as it constitutes a serious crime under international law and a threat to international peace and security. We emphatically condemn the reported use of chemical weapons in the city of Douma, in eastern Ghouta. That incident must be investigated in order to identify the perpetrators, bring them to justice and ensure that their actions do not go unpunished.

Accordingly, we reiterate our support for the work carried out by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and its Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic. However, as we have stated on other occasions, we emphasize the urgent need for an investigative mechanism with a clear mandate that can carry out its assigned tasks of investigating methodically, transparently, technically, faithfully, with assistance and in a fundamentally depoliticized way. We must have a mechanism that can develop an independent, impartial, complete and conclusive investigation to hold accountalbe those responsible for such horrific crimes.

We believe that, if what we want is an independent and transparent mechanism, we have the challenge of not exploiting the Security Council by bringing geopolitical interests on the ground into the Chamber. We have

the challenge of demonstrating to the international community the unity of the Council. To that end, we must not turn the Chamber into a sounding board for warring confrontation and, even less so, transfer the immediate interests of the battlefield to this setting.

In that regard, we welcome the proposal put forward by the Russian Federation today. We will study the text, and we hope that consultations will be convened as soon as possible and that they will result in the Council and the international community having on an independent investigation mechanism.

It is essential that we overcome the lack of trust that exists in the Council. Furthermore, we must always bear in mind that no initiative, however well intended, should supplant our responsibilities, as established by the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): The ongoing use of chemical weapons in Syria represents one of the deplorable elements of this crisis, which has been continuing for seven years. It is all the more deplorable when we see that there is an absence of justice and accountability and that there is impunity for every criminal who has contributed to and participated in such crimes against civilians.

Following the attack when chemical weapons were used in Ghouta, where most of the victims were civilians, we witnessed the unity of the Council in ensuring that such a crime would not be repeated and that perpetrators would be held accountable through the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013). However, unfortunately, we note that there are still reports of chemical attacks in Syria, most recently by Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, yesterday regarding a chemical attack on the city of Duma on 13 January.

We would therefore like to express our disappointment that the Security Council has been unable to reach consensus on renewing the mandate of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, which, we believe, carried out its work in a professional, impartial and independent way. As a result, the failure to renew the mandate meant the complete absence of a tool for accountability in Syria. For that reason, the perpetrators of such crimes will go unpunished and there is no guarantee of holding them, or any perpetrator of such crimes in future, accountable.

The State of Kuwait has a firm, principled position strongly condemning any use of chemical weapons at any time, anywhere and by anyone, since the use of chemical weapons is a grave violation of international law. We underscore the need to hold perpetrators — individuals, entities, non-State groups or Governments — accountable. As members of the Security Council, we are responsible for maintaining international peace and security. We must therefore seek alternatives and mechanisms, agreeable to all members of the Security Council, to ensure the independence, impartiality and professionalism of any new future mechanism to ensure that criminals are held accountable.

We note that there is a draft resolution before us on establishing a new mechanism. We recall the clear and decisive language in resolution 2118 (2013), which stipulates the need to hold accountable those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria. In that regard, the State of Kuwait welcomes the French initiative to convene the Paris meeting on an international partnership against impunity for use of chemical weapons. Along with a number of countries, the State of Kuwait participated in that event to underscore the importance of strengthening the values of justice and accountability and to implement the principle of ending impunity. We support the international mechanisms established by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council to gather evidence regarding any crimes related to human rights violations in Syria.

In conclusion, we emphasize that it is important for the Security Council to stand united when dealing with issues that threaten international peace and security, such as the incidents mentioned in reports on the Syrian crisis, through the unanimous adoption of such resolutions as resolution 2118 (2013), on chemical weapons; resolution 2165 (2014), on the humanitarian situation; and resolution 2254 (2015), on the political track of the Syrian crisis.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks the Russian Federation for having called for this emergency meeting of the Security Council with a view to once again discussing the issue of the use of chemical weapons in general, and in Syria in particular, where, it seems, that atrocious weapon is being used.

My country, which is opposed to the use of chemical weapons, ratified the Convention on the Prohibition

of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction in order to show the world our determination to work with other international stakeholders for the complete elimination of such weapons. To that end, on this very day, 23 January, we signed in Paris the declaration of principles, issued by the meeting held at the initiative of France on the topic of combating impunity through the international partnership against impunity for the use of chemical weapons.

Côte d'Ivoire extends its full support to that initiative and vehemently condemns any use of chemical weapons, regardless of the reasons or perpetrators. In firm support of the values of equity and justice, Côte d'Ivoire wishes to draw the attention of the Security Council to the need to set up a new consensus mechanism aimed at combating the use of chemical weapons.

In that regard, we welcome the Russian initiative to propose the establishment, by means of a resolution, of a new mechanism. We assume that such a mechanism, like the previous one, would be tasked with identifying perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons, in general. In the specific case of Syria, the perpetrators of such acts must be identified and be held accountable for their actions. Inaction by the Council on this important issue would be a bad sign and send a message of encouragement to those who indulge in the use of chemical weapons with impunity.

To conclude, my delegation calls on the Council to act in a consensus-based and coordinated manner in order to establish a new mechanism, for our action must prompt us not only to protect and to help victims, who are martyrs in the endless war in Syria, but also to work to uphold international peace and security.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): The use of chemical weapons, the issue we are considering is critically important to the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. We categorically repudiate and condemn their use by any country, State or non-State actor. We also condemn in the strongest terms the recent chemical-weapon attacks in Syria. With regard to the issue of who is responsible for the use of such weapons, there is no consensus among the members of the Security Council on that. We realize that the Security Council must address the issue of the use of chemical weapons in a spirit of understanding and unanimity, with a view to combating impunity, thereby sending an unambiguous message to anyone who has used such weapons or is thinking of doing so that they will be held responsible for their actions. We repeat that we categorically condemn the production, stockpiling and use of chemical and other weapons of mass destruction.

If we are to take steps against those who have used such weapons, we must clearly identify the responsible parties in a way that leaves no room for doubt. That is why, given the lack of consensus among the members of the Council and the need to identify those responsible for the use of such weapons, we are of the view that the proposal that the Russian Federation has just made is worth considering as a new opportunity for conducting a fully transparent investigation whose results all Council members would have to accept, thereby fostering the unanimity and consensus within the Council that would enable it to take the necessary steps against the perpetrators of the heinous act of using chemical weapons.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my national capacity as the representative of Kazakhstan.

We are deeply worried about the fact that chemical weapons continue to be used in Syria. It is regrettable that this inhuman and illegal type of weapon is being used with the specific purpose of intimidating ordinary people, since it mostly affects unprotected civilians. Another discouraging fact is the lack of unity and the deepening confrontation among the parties on the chemical dossier, which complicates our ability to address this threat in an appropriate way. It is therefore urgent to start thinking about developing a new investigative tool that can effectively counter all such chemical crimes. Any delay or inaction on the part of the Council could lead to an increase in the commission of such acts in the absence of clear plans and mechanisms to end impunity.

We welcome the Russian Federation's proposal to establish a new mechanism, giving us a new opportunity to look into the matter. Since we will have to start over with the creation of an investigative mechanism, we must try to get it right from the very beginning, on a basis of consensus. The mechanism should be impartial, depoliticized, professional, representative, and with a clear mandate that will preclude any doubts and ensure the credibility of its work. That does not mean that we think the previous mechanism was unfit for its purpose, but it is obvious that accountability requires a Security Council that is united in its decision-making.

Kazakhstan is ready to contribute and to assist in finding the best way to move forward together.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked to make a further statement.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I am taking the floor to further clarify our position. It is a pity that my friend Mrs. Haley has left the Chamber. She mentioned that we convened this meeting today on short notice, for which I apologize. As I recall, however, we have frequently been convened by Mrs. Haley's call, and we are ready to do it again. Please let her know that I am doing it because I am always very pleased to see her here.

Once again, everything that we heard from the United States in its statement today was about Russia. The fact that it is rejecting our proposed draft resolution from the get-go says a great deal. It once again betrays a truth that we are sadly familiar with. The United States has no need of any independent professional mechanism. It is not only betraying a truth, it is betraying itself in the eyes of the international community. Let me say straight out what I spoke about before in a rhetorical question. It was no accident that the allegations — which will remain allegations until they are confirmed — about the use of chemical weapons in eastern Ghouta emerged on the eve of some important political events for Syria, the meeting in Vienna and the Syrian national dialogue conference in Sochi. Furthermore, I will say it again, why does the United States need an investigative mechanism when both yesterday and today, before any kind of investigation, it asserted, without apparently a shadow of doubt, that it was the Syrian Government that did it? It has taken the role of both judge and prosecutor.

Does the United States at least understand that it is betraying itself by this? If it genuinely wants to establish a professional, independent attributive mechanism, it should at least read the draft resolution before rejecting it. Did we not discuss a new mechanism with Council members of the Council at the conclusion of the multiple acts in the political spectacle surrounding the closure of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism? We did not time our draft resolution to coincide with any events or partnerships.

However, I want to reiterate something that I spoke about at a Council meeting presided over by President Nazarbayev on 18 January, which is that no commissions, partnerships or so-called independent mechanisms in this area can be legitimate unless they are approved by the Security Council. That must be our premise. I would like to echo what the Permanent Representative of Sweden — and he was not the only one — said in his statement, which is that we must overcome our differences, engage in dialogue and try to restore the Council's lost unity. That is the aim of our proposal.

The meeting rose at 4.10 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8165

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8165th meeting

Wednesday, 24 January 2018, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Umarov	(Kazakhstan)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. French

Agenda

The situation in Somalia

Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia (S/2017/1109)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Somalia

Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia (S/2017/1109)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Somalia to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Michael Keating, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia; and Mr. Francisco Caetano Jose Madeira, Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia and Head of the African Union Mission in Somalia.

Mr. Madeira is joining this meeting via video-teleconference from Addis Ababa.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/1109, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on Somalia.

I now give the floor to Mr. Keating.

Mr. Keating: It is now almost one year since Somalia underwent a peaceful transition of power and the election of President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmajo. Like many new Governments, his has been through a steep learning curve. In the process, it has crafted a commendable national agenda embracing financial reform, job creation, inclusive politics, conflict resolution and reform of the security sector. The focus is now on the essential task of developing a plan for security transition.

In implementing that multipronged agenda, the Federal Government is facing a number of major challenges. One is the mobilization of adequate technical and financial capacity. Another is ensuring coherent and coordinated approaches by both national and international actors. A third is successfully managing the powerful constituencies that need to be on side. Those include federal member states, parliamentarians, clan power brokers, the private sector and international partners.

It is encouraging that following a period of tension between federal member states and the Federal Government late last year, the relationship has stabilized. The form and structure of Somalia's federal system remains a matter of vigorous debate, but the renewed commitment of the Federal Government and federal member states to cooperate to address Somalia's needs is essential in order to make progress on all fronts. The improving relationship between the Government and the private sector is also encouraging, as evidenced by the adoption of the telecommunications act — a milestone in public regulation of the economy — and by an increase in business confidence and domestic revenues.

In December, the International Monetary Fund commended the Somali authorities' progress on policy reforms and its successful completion of the country's first staff-monitored programme since the end of the civil war. That is setting the country on a pathway that leads both to debt relief, increased public and private sector loans and investment, and to more money for basic services and infrastructure. That Somalia's relationship with international partners remains strong was apparent at the Somalia Security Conference and the Partnership Forum, held in Mogadishu in early December 2017. The Government believes that it needs and deserves greater financial support to implement its reform agenda, even if that involves some calculated risks by donors.

Somali politics, however, remain turbulent. In December, tensions were sharply increased in Mogadishu by the violent arrest by the National Intelligence and Security Agency of a prominent opposition politician and by a raid on the house of a leading parliamentarian. The recent replacement of the Mayor has also created waves. Those incidents have highlighted basic problems that need to be addressed, such as inadequate rules and safeguards governing the conduct of politics, including impeachment procedures; blurred roles and lines of accountability of the many security actors; and the perpetuation of corrupt practices and of untraceable money in the political marketplace.

Corruption is a blight, undermining reform efforts and limiting the confidence and trust of Somalis in their leaders and institutions. The effects can be seen in all areas of public life from business to politics, justice to

security, while playing into the hands of extremists. The Government has declared its determination to develop plans to address corruption in the coming year. In the meantime, all Somali actors need to respect the rule of law and resist the use of violence against their political opponents. Otherwise, the risk is that the many positive developments under way will be overshadowed, and the Government's ability to implement its broader agenda and improve the lives of the population will be undermined.

The scale of the challenges facing the country are daunting. Chronic poverty and persistent humanitarian needs are casting an ominous shadow over Somalia. The risk of famine continues to loom after four consecutive failed rainy seasons. The 2018 humanitarian response plan calls for $1.6 billion. Although famine was averted in 2017 thanks to national leadership, collective humanitarian action and historic levels of donor support, food security needs are nearly double the five-year average, and an estimated 6.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Malnutrition reached emergency levels in many locations and is expected to increase. Drought and conflict have displaced more than 2 million people within the country — up to a million of them in the last 12 months — including many children and more than 80,000 pregnant women.

Given the recurrent nature of droughts in Somalia, an imperative is to address the root causes of Somalia's fragility and build resilience to shocks. That is needed to prevent further refugee flows and displacement. Humanitarian interventions must be complemented by investment in job-creating public works and infrastructure. The basis for that will be the drought impact needs assessment and recovery resilience framework, which is being developed by the Federal Government with support from the United Nations, the World Bank and the European Union. Continued support will be needed to help Somalia break the cycle of recurrent crises that cause so much suffering and undermine the peacebuilding and State-building process.

Central to that process is gaining political agreement as to how power will be exercised, shared and accounted for. That requires progress in three key areas: review of the provisional federal constitution, preparation for the 2020-2021 elections, and conflict resolution and reconciliation. The national constitutional convention scheduled for March and/or April is expected to launch the next phase of the constitutional review process, focusing on resource- and power-sharing between the Federal Government and the federal member states, the status of Mogadishu and harmonization of the Federal and member state constitutions.

In December 2017, the National Independent Electoral Commission launched its strategic plan to achieve universal elections. That will require sustained political support and donor funding. Registration of political parties will help stabilize politics. Thus far, seven have been registered, including one led by a woman. Registration is also an essential step towards holding universal elections. Immediate priorities include the development and adoption of the electoral law by the Parliament, reaching agreement on the system of representation, decisions on voter registration and ongoing capacity-building and the institutional development of the national Independent Electoral Commission, including in the Federal member states.

Regarding conflict resolution and reconciliation, the Federal Government plans to launch a national strategy in the coming months, while recognizing the multifaceted nature of the many disputes and grievances in the country. On the ground, there has been some significant progress. Since 2015, Galmudug has been split between the state authorities and Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama'a, with the state administration displaced to Cadaado. On 18 January in Dhusamareb, President Farmajo oversaw a ceremony to mark an agreement between the two to merge Assemblies, constitutions and security arrangements, and return the state administration to Dhusamareb — an agreement reached through political dialogue. That bodes well for efforts to resolve other disputes including in Galkayo. Several continue to simmer, while creating space for and distracting attention from the bigger threat posed by Al-Shabaab.

There is a serious danger that long-standing disputes between Puntland and Somaliland, and in particular an armed stand-off in Sool, could erupt into violence in the coming days, with potentially grave consequences. That closely follows delayed presidential elections and the orderly and peaceful transfer of power that took place in Somaliland late last year. With the support of international partners, including many on the Council, I have urged the leaders of Puntland and Somaliland to declare a cessation of hostilities, withdraw their forces, restore the status quo ante and open channels of communication.

Al-Shabaab remains a potent threat, despite, or perhaps because, it is on the back foot as a result of financial pressures, counter-terrorism operations and air strikes. On 14 October, Mogadishu suffered the most deadly attack caused by an improvised explosive devise ever perpetrated, with an estimated 512 people killed, nearly all of whom were civilians. On 10 December 2017, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia released its first public report, entitled "Protection of civilians: building the foundations for peace, security and human rights in Somalia", which covers the period from 1 January 2016 to 14 October 2017. It documented a total of 2,078 civilians killed and 2,507 injured. The large majority of those casualties are attributable to Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab abducted civilians and conducted targeted assassinations and summary executions. In addition, 729 civilians were abducted by Al-Shabaab, of whom 403 were released. Five days ago, the Somali National Army's Danab special forces rescued 36 children from an Al-Shabaab training camp, many of whom had been forcibly recruited into the movement.

Defeating Al-Shabaab will require both a military and political strategy — the use of both sticks and carrots — as well as sustained efforts to address deficits that lend extremists a degree of credibility. Those include corruption, the lack of educational and job opportunities for young people, weak national justice and corrections capacity, and grievances arising from unresolved disputes. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) remains fundamental to security in the country and can take credit for having created the space to allow Somalia's political progress over the last decade. I pay tribute to the bravery and sacrifice of its troops, and am grateful to the troop- and police-contributing countries for their commitment to Somalia.

AMISOM cannot stay indefinitely. This year will require a dedicated effort by the Somali leadership, the African Union and international partners to build political acceptability and operational capability of the Somali security sector. That should enable AMISOM to gradually hand over responsibility to Somali security forces and to enable the Federal and state Governments as per the agreements in the national security architecture to exercise a monopoly over the use of force. The current situation, whereby security responsibilities are fragmented, often privately controlled and unaccountable, is both dangerous and untenable.

To that end, on 4 December 2017, the Federal Government of Somalia and the federal member states agreed to develop a transition plan in the first quarter of this year, working closely with international partners, most importantly the African Union, the troop- and police-contributing countries and major international investors in Somalia's security, including the European Union. They agreed to create a conditions-based plan with clear milestones and target dates. It will be rooted in the comprehensive approach to security to ensure that planning focuses not only on military handover but also on policing, the rule of law and the strengthening of basic local governance, all of which are essential to sustaining security gains and to the credibility of the State. The transition plan will be the basis for securing future support for Somalia's security sector, and for AMISOM.

The starting point for the plan is not ideal. The Federal Government of Somalia has undertaken an operational readiness assessment of the Somali National Army and the Somali Police Force, providing a much clearer understanding of their capability. They have revealed multiple deficits and the enormous challenge ahead in translating the national security architecture into reality on the ground. AMISOM's continued presence will therefore be essential. The premature drawdown of AMISOM forces would be a gift to Al-Shabaab and risks undermining the gains that have been made, at great human and financial cost, over the past decade. The United Nations will continue to work closely with the African Union and key security investors to explore sustainable, predictable funding mechanisms for AMISOM, and support to AMISOM to effectively fulfil its mandate.

Progress is being made. The 2,400 Puntland defence forces have been integrated into the Somali National Army — a possible model for integration in other parts of the country. There is agreement on the allocation of police numbers for each state, for Mogadishu and the Federal Government. Each federal member state has developed a state police plan. A harmonized justice and corrections model has been endorsed by the National Security Council, which provides the basis for the establishment of an independent and impartial justice system. Action plans have been developed to implement the national strategy on preventing and countering violent extremism.

The human rights situation continues to be of great concern. The rule of law is weak and capacities and mechanisms to protect and promote basic rights are lacking. Forced evictions, sexual violence and the repression of freedom of expression are among the many indicators, with marginalized and minority groups being particularly vulnerable. The United Nations is supporting the Federal Government to strengthen frameworks, institutions and measures for upholding human rights, address impunity and improve the protection of women and children, and to take action to end the involvement of children in armed conflict. The formation of the national human rights commission is a positive step forward.

Somalia is making definite progress, though the risks remain real. It is fortunate to have a Government that is committed to implementing reform, resolving conflicts and meeting the formidable social, economic and security needs of the population. Continued progress is dependent not only on the strong political will and skill of the Federal Government, but also on cooperation and partnership with federal member states, Parliament, clan elders, business and international partners. When all of those constituencies cooperate, huge strides can be made.

I strongly encourage Somali stakeholders to unite to tackle those priorities and make 2018 a year of implementation. Allow me to take this opportunity to encourage international partners to continue their financial generosity, their support for strengthening technical capacities, and to be transparent and coordinated in their assistance.

The President: I thank Mr. Keating for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Madeira.

Mr. Madeira: I thank you, Sir, for another opportunity to brief the Security Council on the situation in Somalia. Addressing the Council remains a great honour for me.

I bring the Council greetings from the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, who acknowledges the immense efforts that the Council, the Federal Government of Somalia and the African Union are making to restore peace, security and prosperity to Somalia and its people.

Since my last statement to the Council (see S/PV.7905), Somalia has witnessed political and security developments, which had a considerable impact on the country, and on our joint endeavour to contain Al-Shabaab and put an end to insurgency and violent extremism in the country and in the region. The signing at Villa Somalia in Mogadishu on 6 December 2017 of the peace, unity and reconciliation agreement between the President of Galmudug, Mr. Ahmed Duale Geele "Xaaf", and the leader of Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama'a, Mr. Sheikh Mohamud Shakir, and the high-level ceremony on 18 January in Dhusamareb, marking the beginning of the implementation of the agreement in the presence of President Farmajo, the Head of State of the Federal Republic of Somalia, is a very positive development in the reconciliation process among the political class in Galmudug. That important event, which also included a reconciliation tour by President Farmajo of towns and villages in Puntland and Galmudug, is a clear demonstration of the determination of the Somali people to strive to put aside their differences and concentrate on the factors that unite them in order to allow peace, unity and stability to be restored not only in Galmudug, but also in the entire territory of the Federal Republic of Somalia.

In that vein, we congratulate President Mohamed Farmajo for using his wisdom to convene and chair a nine-day high-level consultative meeting with the country's top political leadership, thereby helping to ease the difficult political environment surrounding the crisis, and allowing for a profound and comprehensive engagement by the political class and agreements to be reached on the way to handle a variety of issues of central importance for the future of the country. Those agreements, which sought the most suitable ways to improve security in the country and eliminate terrorism, promote the federal system, fast-track the review of the provisional constitution, adopt a unified approach to the 2020 electoral process, strengthen cooperation between the Federal Government and the federal member states, create development projects and provide humanitarian assistance, highlight the importance of bridging gaps in the national security architecture, accelerate the formation of an integrated national army, reconfigure defence forces and establish a technical committee of the National Security Council to work on police force and coastguard allocations, are central to our joint efforts to approach security in a comprehensive manner and to ensure lasting stability for the country.

The strong manifestation of unity of the Somali political leadership is central and indispensable to the success of our collective efforts in Somalia.

Extreme poverty, insurgency, intolerance, entrenched community grievances, ideological competition, violent extremism and terrorism are some of the important factors influencing the persistent volatile political and security environment in the country. The newly found unity of the Somali political leadership needs to be harnessed. It is needed for these challenges to be tackled and addressed comprehensively, concurrently and with renewed determination.

Currently, the security situation in Somalia remains volatile. Al-Shabaab attacks in the form of very crude bombs, Improvised explosive devices, ambushes, targeted assassinations and grenade attacks are being registered with concerning regularity. On 14 October, we saw the horrific example of the destruction that Al-Shabaab can bring to Somalia and its people when, in a cowardly attack, the group drove a large bomb that exploded at the busy Zobe intersection in Mogadishu, killing more than 500 people and injuring many hundreds more.

The Zobe massacre was Somalia's deadliest terrorist attack and its scale shocked many beyond Somalia and the region, yet, in the true spirit of the brave Somali people, the massacre not only sparked widespread protest against Al-Shabaab, but it also united all the Somalis. Indeed, winning the people to our side and denying Al-Shabaab territorial space and shelter among the Somali communities is key to success in our common endeavour to restore comprehensive peace and security in Somalia. At a time when Somalia was at its lowest, following the attack, we saw the immediate and appropriate response from the Federal Government. Not only did President Farmajo rally the country behind a united front, but he also called for an extraordinary session of parliament to direct both houses to strategize on what additional courses of action needed to be undertaken to effectively fight a common enemy. We also note the President's commendable efforts to consult with and garner support from the troop-contributing countries of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) following the attack.

This year is a crucial one for the African Union and AMISOM in Somalia. This is tied to our current mandate under resolution 2372 (2017), which requests that AMISOM's troops be drawn down, its police personnel scaled up and offensive operations conducted against Al-Shabaab. In spite of the burden this has placed upon AMISOM and Somalia, AMISOM's troop levels have gone down and currently stand at 20,537 following its drawdown in 2017. We have also seen the additional deployment of police from Nigeria and, in the coming weeks, we expect another formed police unit from Sierra Leone.

As AMISOM prepares for its eventual exit from Somalia, we are in regular contact with the Federal Government, consulting on how to ensure that AMISOM's transfer of its security responsibilities is not only seamless, but also conditions-based and responsible, as mandated by the Council in August. That is why the African Union and AMISOM have continued to engage the Federal Government on the transition process. In that vein, both the African Union and AMISOM offered valuable observations on the Government's transition plan and co-chaired the Government's transition planning meeting of 15 January, which led to the establishment of a transitional plan core group.

On the African Union and AMISOM's part, we wish to see coherence among various stakeholders in Somalia's transition plan. We also wish to see an appropriate mechanism for leading the transition plan that avoids duplication of efforts and takes into consideration the 1 December 2017 decisions, in particular the operationalization of the Somali-African Union joint task force.

AMISOM looks forward to achieving a realistic and responsible transition. We will work with the Somali National Army and other stakeholders to undertake robust operations against Al-Shabaab. We will continue to secure main supply routes, protect population centres and build infrastructure — such as key bridges — in order to link population centres and support humanitarian activities. These operations, however, are all subject to the availability of requisite support and force enablers and multipliers.

Permit me to remind the Council that the plan for transition from AMISOM to the Somali security forces, as requested in resolution 2372 (2017), anticipated a national army built on the basis of the principle of four As — a Somali army that is acceptable, accountable, affordable and able. With the release of the Federal Government's frank and transparent operational readiness assessment report in December, the African Union and AMISOM share the Government's assessment that the Somali National Army, in its current state of readiness, is not in a position to assume responsibility from AMISOM forces currently deployed in Somalia.

The main objective of the operational readiness assessment has been achieved to determine the current operational capability of the Somali National Army and its readiness to assume AMISOM's responsibilities. However, the African Union and AMISOM consider the operational readiness assessment to be a process that identifies gaps in the Somali National Army that must be addressed before AMISOM can effectively and responsibly transition. AMISOM, by far, carries the burden of security in Somalia. We will continue to mentor the Somali National Army and the Somali Police Force, as requested by the Council resolution, until a time when the conditions are deemed appropriate for Somalia to have a transition to full sovereignty of its security responsibility. Those must include operational readiness assessment for the regional forces in the coming weeks and months.

Resolution 2372 (2017) called for a revision of AMISOM's concept of operations. In the light of the challenges faced by AMISOM in the implementation of the current concept of operations, the Heads of State, the Heads of Chiefs of Defence staff of the troop- and police-contributing countries held a meeting in Addis Ababa on 1 December 2017. They recommended that the African Union Commission review the Mission's concept of operations, in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders. We intend to work with everybody. We will exclude no one, and we intend to make sure that the concept of operations is in line with the Government's transition plan. We need a common vision and approach so that the transition plan that the Government of Somalia announced on 4 December is one that we all share and are ready to implement. While the consultations for a new concept of operations have begun, the completion of the operational readiness assessment exercise will be crucial to developing a final transition plan that will inform a revised concept of operations for AMISOM.

In spite of the realities that the operational readiness assessment has made us all confront, the Federal Government continues to show some progress on the common approach to security, notably the operationalization of the National Security Council and the chairing of the first meeting of the Executive Group by Prime Minister Khayre in November 2017. While that meeting was held to update the international donor community on the progress of the various strands of the common approach to security, more progress is needed on strands 1 and 2, which, as far as we are concerned, are two sides of the same coin, since enabling AMISOM to undertake robust operations, protect population centres and secure and protect the main supply routes makes sense only if we enable the Somalis to undertake these operations alongside us and eventually take them over.

In order to achieve those goals and not risk a reversal of the gains made by AMISOM and its Somali partners, predictable and sustainable funding must be made available not only for AMISOM but also for the Somali security forces. We therefore welcome the joint decision of Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, and Secretary-General António Guterres to appoint Mr. Ramtame Lamamra and Mr. Jean-Marie Guéhenno as AMISOM's financing envoys. They must be listened to very carefully. They are genuinely trying to help overcome a problem that has posed so many challenges to us in Somalia. We expect that generous contributions will come out of their efforts. Their role will be crucial in the coming months as our partners deliberate on AMISOM's funding and as the two envoys set out the parameters for possible options for that funding in the future, as well as that of the Somali National Army.

The President: I thank Mr. Madeira for his briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank Mr. Michael Keating, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and Mr. Francisco Madeira, Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia, for their detailed and informative briefings today.

We would first like to commend the joint work being done by the United Nations and the African Union in Somalia. Their deployment of civilian, military and police personnel in peacebuilding efforts — rebuilding the State, strengthening the rule of law, reforming the security sector and other essential objectives — is crucial to the quest for stability and security in the subregion. We believe that the support and assistance efforts of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the United Nation Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) and the United Nations Support Office in Somalia must be conducted with a high degree of transparency as well as greater and better coordination and information exchanges.

In that regard, the road map for political stabilization in Somalia is crucial, consisting principally of formalizing the statute of the federal member states, implementing the security strategy, and building resilience and promoting socioeconomic change, which requires the Somali Government to define its priorities within the framework of its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. With regard to Somalia's socioeconomic transformation, we believe that in order to ensure lasting and sustainable peace and make the Somali State less fragile, it is essential not only to reform the security sector but also to work to restructure its foreign debt, since in the post-conflict phase there can be no sustainable peace without development and there will be no development at all if the debt issue is not resolved. With regard to security-sector reform, Somali ownership is essential, based on a relationship of trust, consensus and inclusivity on the part of both the Federal Government and the federal states. In that regard, we want to emphasize UNSOM's important role in supporting the National Security Council, which we consider crucial to improving capacities in the areas of demobilization, reintegration and disarmament, as well as the handling of arms, maritime security and strengthening the country's police forces.

Bolivia fully supports the efforts of the African Union to implement all initiatives for mediation, preventive diplomacy and dialogue aimed at arriving at peaceful and sustainable solutions to conflicts. In that regard, we would like to highlight the work of AMISOM and its personnel, some of whom have sacrificed their lives in fulfilling their mandate. The Security Council and the United Nations must continue helping to strengthen its capacity so that Somalia's security forces can take on full responsibility for the maintenance of security in their country as soon as possible.

We are very concerned about the threat that Al-Shabaab continues to pose in Somalia, constantly endangering the process of political stabilization and increasing tensions in the subregion through its deadly and complex attacks on innocent civilians, the Somali security forces and AMISOM. The attacks have once again demonstrated the impact of this terrorist group and the importance of coming up with measures to counter its threats, especially in Mogadishu, where attacks such as the one that occurred on 14 October of last year have resulted in the loss of hundreds of innocent lives and great material damage due to the use of improvised explosive devices, car bombs and large-calibre weapons.

We are also concerned about the continued precarious humanitarian situation. The abduction, recruitment and indoctrination of child soldiers persist, as does sexual violence against women and girls, especially those who have suffered forced displacement. We appreciate UNSOM's coordination with the United Nations Development Programme in implementing support programmes for protecting the victims of sexual violence and establishing preventive measures. At the same time, the risk of famine is having serious consequences for the most vulnerable sectors of the population. In that regard, Bolivia condemns anyone who obstructs humanitarian aid and demands that the parties permit and facilitate the people's full and speedy access to supplies.

In conclusion, we urge the international community to continue working in close coordination with the United Nations and the African Union in the interests of consolidating peace, stability and security in Somalia through inclusive dialogue and the implementation of effective security mechanisms that will enable it once and for all to eliminate threats to the peace process and above all to the entire Somali people.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the holding of this briefing and express our gratitude to Mr. Michael Keating, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), for his comprehensive briefing. We also appreciate the briefing by the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Mr. Francisco Caetano Jose Madeira.

Peru supports the goal of achieving sustainable peace in Somalia and vigorously condemns the terrorist barbarism of Al-Shabaab. We also express our concern about the serious human rights violations seen in the country, especially the rights of boys and girls, many of whom are victims of recruiting.

We also we want to recognize the progress made by Somalia and the efforts of the new Government, specifically in the process of building a federal State, including the outline of a national security strategy, despite the difficult circumstances and the fact that much remains to be done in Somalia. We commend the dialogue between the Federal Government and the federal member states on, inter alia, agreeing on the

principles that should form the basis of that strategy. We also welcome the establishment of the National Security Council. We believe it is critical that there be a gradual and orderly transition of responsibilities in the area of security from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to Somali authorities, while ensuring that they be properly prepared to respond adequately to existing threats.

Along the same lines, we commend the steps taken towards the building of a Somali police service and the Somali National Army. My delegation is convinced that, in addition to those institutions, joint and coordinated action is necessary at all levels of Government. It is key to continue building trust between the Federal Government and the federal member states, as well as to provide them with stability and predictability in distributing roles and responsibilities among them. In that regard, we believe an overhaul of the Constitution is critical to resolve key issues of the conflict. We welcome the adoption of a road map, and we stress the need to agree on a division of powers and a model for managing and controlling natural resources and distributing income.

The political divisions that have existed in Somalia are perhaps the biggest obstacle to the reforms the country needs. National reconciliation should be understood as a grassroots-driven process that is initiated by society from the local level to the federal level. We believe it is appropriate to evaluate the possibility of beginning parallel preparations for universal elections in 2020 and 2021. We believe that encouraging greater participation by women and young people in the elections could have a substantial impact on consolidating a national agenda focused on sustainable development in the country. Those efforts must go hand in hand with affirmative policies in the areas of human rights and international humanitarian law for the entire population.

We recognize the significant contributions of AMISOM, UNSOM and the United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) and their partners in bringing about peace and stability in the country. We believe that it is important to provide predictable and sustainable financing for AMISOM in order to avert risks related to a premature or sudden drawdown, as it is quite possible that that would reverse the substantial political progress made over the past decade. It is also important to maintain coordinated efforts among AMISOM, UNSOM and UNSOS and the countries that contribute to the peace process. In that regard, it is worrying that differences among some countries in the Middle East may be accentuating the differences between the central Government and the federal member states.

Moreover, we would like to commend the initiative to complement the response to the humanitarian crisis in Somalia with a preventive perspective. The drought needs assessment will help the Federal Government understand the factors that contribute to the vulnerability of the country.

Lastly, given this situation, it is important to bear in mind that more than half of the working-age population, most of whom are young people, are currently unemployed — a situation exacerbated by the return of 400,000 refugees. We therefore commend the fact that the Government has launched a national development plan aimed at promoting the recovery of the Somali economy and tackling the deep-seated causes of the conflict, and we hope it will receive the support of the international community.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Somalia.

Mr. Osman (Somalia): Please allow me to begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I would also like to acknowledge the successful tenure of your predecessor and the positive role he played in leading the Council last month.

The Federal Government of Somalia is committed to making continuous progress on security and financial reform. There has been much progress since the Somalia Security Conference, including a plan for the plan within the deadline, which was developed in close cooperation with the federal member states. The relationship between the Federal Government of Somalia and the federal member states is strong, as demonstrated by President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo's current peace tour in the north-eastern and central regions of Somalia and his visit to Galkayo with President Xaaf of Galmudug and President Gaas of Puntland. During this week's peace tour, President Farmajo visited several towns in Puntland and Galmudug states and held crucial meetings with state leaders, elders, civil society groups and politicians on the reconciliation process. The meeting that led to the agreement between Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama'a and Galmudug was another milestone. There has also been close collaboration with the federal member

states on economic recovery, including dealing with anti-corruption issues and reform. A path to inclusive politics has been charted, and discussions will now also include security sector reform.

However, the existing arms embargo framework on Somalia is major obstacle to the effective implementation of our ambitious security sector reform plans. The current arms embargo supports a disjointed supply of weapons and ammunition to various different security sector entities or federal member states, without the knowledge or the approval of the Government. That contributes to fragmenting our country and jeopardizes our peacebuilding, our political progress and, above all, the unity of Somalia.

There may be a rationale for limited specific exemptions, but the arms embargo framework must be closely aligned with the Somali security architecture. The Monitoring Group, in its Implementation Assistance Notice No. 2 of 2016, recognizes those concerns and provides recommendations to the Security Council, which have to date not been implemented. We are a fragile, recovering State, and it is critical that all members of the Security Council play their part in influencing a reduction in the micromanaging and current destabilizing levels of foreign interference in our internal affairs, especially with regard to the ongoing Gulf crisis. Needless to say, we see those concerns as an affront to our sovereignty and independence. In the past, there was less clarity on security than on economic and political reform; but our national security architecture now provides a comprehensive approach.

The devastating truck bomb explosion of 14 October at a major junction in Mogadishu, which destroyed property and killed over 500 innocent civilians, with more than 200 injured or missing, was regarded as the biggest and deadliest vehicle-borne improvised explosive device terrorist attack in the world's history. That event again served to underscore the Al-Shabaab terrorist group's ability to stage large-scale attacks, despite months-long offensives against it by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the Somali National Army (SNA). Somalia will forever remember that dark day in our history. The Somali people and our Government are more united than ever in the fight against Al-Shabaab.

After the attack, on 11 November, the Prime Minister chaired the first meeting of the executive group on a comprehensive approach to security. Each of the group's strands is led by a relevant member from a federal ministry, with the support of international partners, including AMISOM, the European Union, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. A critical priority is to enable AMISOM operations by enhancing its operational effectiveness and providing predictable and sustainable funding. In that regard, it is crucial to listen to, and to take into due consideration, the joint message of the African Union and United Nations envoys on the AMISOM funding consultations.

Moreover, the recently conducted operational readiness assessment revealed that the Somali National Army lacked the properly trained manpower, barracks, weapons and ammunition, as well as logistical support. The Somali National Army needs to be capacitated in all fields — training, equipment, mobility and weapons — to be able to inherit, hold and preserve the gains achieved. Without support against the constraints I mentioned, the transition from AMISOM to the Somali national security forces will be a mirage. The transition from AMISOM to the SNA should be conditions-based.

We take this opportunity to pay special tribute to the African Union. Ten years ago, Somalia was in a very different position, and Somalis everywhere are grateful to AMISOM for the sacrifices made to help our people. Somalia needs AMISOM for the transition and the continued support of our partners in building the Somali national security forces, based on our national security architecture and the outcome of the operational readiness assessment.

The Federal Government of Somalia is committed to carrying out democratic, transparent and credible elections by 2020-2021 under the leadership of President Farmajo. The holding of the elections in 2020-2021 is clearly articulated in the provisional constitution of the Federal Republic of Somalia. The political road map emphasizes that democratization is an essential component in building a viable State. The road map sets out the critical steps necessary to achieve the envisaged credible direct elections in 2020-2021, with a division of roles, responsibilities and timelines of the different constitutionally mandated institutions of the Government. Accompanying the road map is a logical framework matrix to monitor and evaluate progress, on a weekly basis, on the political benchmarks of all the relevant institutions by the Cabinet subcommittee for inclusive politics, chaired by the Prime Minister.

I would like to draw the attention of the Security Council to the looming humanitarian crisis in Somalia. According to United Nations specialized agencies, 6.2 million people are still in need of humanitarian assistance due to the drought and the conflict in Somalia. The agencies are particularly concerned that the below-average rainfalls for a fourth consecutive season and the forecast indications of a fifth consecutive below-average season indicate that the risk of famine remains in many parts of Somalia in 2018. We also remain concerned about the more than 1 million people who have been newly displaced, in addition to the 1.2 million already in a state of protracted displacement. We thank our partners for their continued support and strongly appeal to their generosity in taking the necessary actions, including the provision of resources, to ensure the continued delivery of urgent humanitarian relief.

To conclude, my delegation wishes once again to express to the Council the gratitude of the Somali people and their Government for the efforts of the United Nations to ensure peace and stability in their country. I would also like to reiterate my Government's commitment to implementing its economic, political and security reforms. The road to final peace may be long and difficult but, with the support of our partners, we are optimistic that we will continue on the path to peace, progress and prosperity.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.